

Patchy Finnish Nature

Boundaries and boundary crossings in East Helsinki

Master 's Programme in Contemporary Societies, Social and Cultural Anthropology

Master's thesis

Author:

Xiaolin Li

Supervisor:

Sarah Green

December 2022

Helsinki

Table of Contents

Abstract	
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	4
Chapter 2: Nature as a Distinctly Finnish Way of Living.....	25
Chapter 3: Nature in the “Field”: Cultivating Boundaries.....	43
Chapter 4: Racism, Speciesism and the Alternatives.....	56
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	76
References.....	

Abstract

The thesis looks at how people with immigrant backgrounds experience Finnish nature, focusing on East Helsinki. It shows the “patchiness” of Finnish nature, which means that it is perceived and experienced in many ways, being much richer and more complicated than the popular discourses and understandings of what Finnish nature is like, and how people relate to nature, as is pictured by the authorities and held by many people, including immigrants and “Finns”. The thesis shows that establishing a rigid representational image of Finnish nature and making “living close to nature as a distinctly Finnish way of living” a norm is problematic, because it is a demarcation of belonging and not belonging, of citizenship and alienness that could bear implicit racism, even though immigrants may not be aware of the existence of this cultural evaluation of them, or not actively trying to become Finnish. Nature gives rise to different social practices that make and undo boundaries of social relations in people's relating to others and understanding differences. People make differences and communicate across differences. By doing so, they make and cross multiple boundaries, in terms of ethnicity, culture, race, language, nationality and so on. Immigrants' self-imposed boundaries and boundaries imposed by others on them are different. Decolonizing Finnish nature is needed, and it is implied in the patchiness of human-nature relations. The thesis also suggests that anti-racism requires an understanding of racism based on spatial locations. Conceptually, the binary opposition between nature and culture is unraveled by the research results. It requires understanding nature-culture articulations on the ground, namely how people make differences and communicate across differences, recognizing the need to retain self-made boundaries and break the ones imposed by others, and understanding that underneath the appearance of rigidity is actually considerable flexibility, a constantly changing set of conditions that is made to appear timeless and rigid, but is actually not so. Politically, it requires keeping “nature” as a concept separate from a “culture of nature” that is tied to Finnish national character. Nature should facilitate boundary crossings by cultivating mutual understanding and recognizing that “others” are in the right place, instead of being a boundary itself.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Sitting in the backyard of the Myllypuro church, next to the lush green forest of the neighborhood, Omar, a thirty-two-year-old resident from Gambia, couldn't hide his enthusiasm when talking about the European hares he found to be exceptionally abundant in the area: "These rabbits are floating like water. In my country, people eat those and hunt those." It took him months after moving to Finland to stop thinking of hares, which are called "rusakko" in Finnish, as prey. He recounted his experience with a hearty laugh both for his own and my amusement, as if he saw a great deal of humor in the story. "It was a winter night with snowfall, and there wasn't anybody outside. I saw a rusakko from the balcony and deemed it was a good time to hunt them. My wife stopped me immediately telling me to never touch these animals, or the police will take me away." Omar's wife, who is Finnish, took her husband's thoughts and possible imminent actions to be alarming and potentially leading to a disastrous situation that needed to be dealt with immediately by making a remark that implied a harsh consequence to prevent the undesirable from happening. The dramatic experience demonstrates a sharp contrast between Omar and his wife in terms of the way they approach the same animals. The exchange points towards a need to investigate the multiplicities and complexities of ways of relating to nature, and other than humans coexisting in the same environment in Finland, a place replete with representations of nature as a way of living that has become a crucial, even central encompassing component of Finnishness.

A glimpse of Finnish nature as a fundamental constitution of Finnish nationhood is needed at this point. According to a survey by the Foundation for Municipal Development conducted in 2021, when Finns talk to foreigners about their country, Finland's pristine natural environment and landscape are often their greatest source of national pride¹. The implied population is vague: who are Finns and who are foreigners? What is Finland's natural environment and landscape like and in which way is it

¹ [Study finds nature the greatest source of national pride for Finns \(helsinkitimes.fi\)](https://www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/news-in-brief/19314-study-finds-nature-the-greatest-source-of-national-pride-for-finns.html)
<https://www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/news-in-brief/19314-study-finds-nature-the-greatest-source-of-national-pride-for-finns.html>

pristine? While the survey offers some input on the socio-political significance of nature in Finland, it also elicits questions about boundaries in terms of citizenship and migration. Nature in Finland has also been successfully branded and publicized by the Finnish government, including Visit Finland and Business Finland. That advertising has been sent to local municipal offices at home and abroad. The beauty of the Finnish wilderness and a certain way of relating to Finnish nature dominates public discourse and has become firmly embedded within the idea of the Finnish nation in a global market where nature works as an attraction for tourism, investment, talent attraction, product promotion and business development. However, when looking at the pervasive visual contents representing the lifestyle of living close to nature in Finland, the ethnic homogeneity of the people depicted is palpable. In most cases people who can be commonly understood as ethnic Finnish are the representatives of this special Finnish connection with nature (see figure 1).



Figure 1. This is a picture found on Visit Finland website under the section of “The 10 best things to do in Finland” depicting a man and a woman picking berries in forests. Credits: Julia Kivelä.

A simple question, also a starting point of this research, is to ask whether this mode of living is inclusive enough to incorporate diversity, especially ethnic, racial, and sociocultural diversity. Could it be another myth of Finnishness besides education (Dervin 2019) to be in one way or another destabilized? The point here is not about proving that Finland does not have charming nature or people in Finland do not interact closely with nature. After all, Finland has the highest percentage of forest coverage in

Europe², which suggests the abundance of nature in the country. And we do see a lot of people practicing nature-related activities daily. The concern is about the line it draws between Finns and others in generating a politics of nature-culture that is capable of omission, exclusion, discrimination, knowledge hegemony, singularity and inequality, all of which are built on a fundamental resort to classification and negotiation of boundary crossings. The complex interplay of nature, culture and society in the ethnographic context offers an opportunity to understand the interrelation between otherness and nature and helps to pursue a fresh understanding of nationhood, decolonization and anti-racism, and on a deeper level, to reflect on the long-debated relation between nature and culture. Details of the debates are outlined below, and this thesis aims to contribute to them.

Some of the questions I ask are: Do people with immigrant backgrounds perceive, experience and interact with Finnish nature in a similar way to what is perceived and represented as common for Finns? What can the commonalities and differences in their articulation with nature say about the dynamics of nature-culture relationship, closely entangled with the positioning of immigrants in Finnish society? Obviously, the idea of a pristine and unchanging Finnish nature that is supposed to give rise to Finnishness is an ideological assertion, a stereotype that is aimed at doing particular nationalist work. My interest in this is what the implications of that ideology are. To go further, what work does the idea of national character do in social, cultural or political terms? What if self-categorization can replace categorization of others in dispensing with rigid categories and types so that boundaries are not imposed by others, and the crossings they entail do not require strenuous efforts? To be more explicit, some immigrants do not see Finland as their homes, and they are also highlighting that they are different. This could be understood as a form of self-categorization and a process of self-making boundaries. Decolonizing Finnish nature is implied in the patchiness of human-nature relations. It requires understanding nature-culture articulations in the field, namely how people make differences and communicate across differences, recognizing the need to retain self-made boundaries and break the ones imposed by others, and understanding that

² [Forest resources in Finland - Maa- ja metsätalousministeriö \(mmm.fi\)](http://mmm.fi)

underneath the appearance of rigidity is actually considerable flexibility, a constantly changing set of conditions that is made to appear timeless and rigid, but is actually not so. Politically, it requires keeping “nature” as a concept separate from a “culture of nature” that is tied to Finnish national character. Nature should facilitate boundary crossings by cultivating mutual understanding and recognizing that “others” are in the right place, instead of being a boundary itself.

Nature-culture relations

Nature-culture relations stay close to the heart of the research and this paper adds to the theoretical debates about it.

Before the current preoccupations with nature-culture relations that concern the deconstruction of nature-culture dualism, anthropologists studied the diverse ways people relate to nature, using an idealist (Lévi-Strauss 1963; Leach 1964; Geertz 1973) or a materialist (Steward 1955; Harris 1966) approach, or a combination of both (Pálsson 1991).

Following the above-mentioned focus came the critique of nature-culture dualism, which is among many discredited divides finding their roots in euro-centric rationalities: mind and body, subjective and objective, human and animal, foraging and husbandry, growth and production, producer and product etc. Since the turn of the century, the divide has been constantly posed under scrutiny where the nature-culture relation is being critically reexamined, more specifically, being undone (e.g., Latour 1991; Viveiros de Castro 1998; Ingold 2000; Haraway 2008; Descola 2013; Tsing 2015; Braverman 2015; Parreñas 2018 etc.). While some try to argue that the nature-culture divide is an illusion and misunderstanding with their ethnographic materials in the given contexts, some prefer alternatives found in non-western contexts and take the native point of view as resources to radically remake the concepts of nature, culture and nature-culture relation, and to challenge the underlying ontological presumptions of anthropology, some develop and update the anthropological toolkit of studying nature-culture and others. To provide some details of these iconic works, Castro (1998) challenged the idea that there are many cultures, but nature is universally the same. Ingold's (2000) perception of environment as an approach draws “wisdom” from

various non-western ethnographic contexts and argues for the integration of society and ecology. One human being is at the same time a person conceived in social relations and an organism in the environment. Nature and culture cannot be separated, and we live in an environment called naturecultures (Haraway 2007). Descola (2013) defines four types of ontological system, and western society (Latour 1991) falls into the category of naturalism. The efforts to overturn nature-culture duality are ongoing and thriving. All the endeavors, be they perspectivism, actor-network theory, or posthumanism, are basically suggesting what Scott (2015) terms as “relational nondualism”, in contrast to “dualism”. And here is where problems arise.

The lurking concerns are readily seen in the opening questions written in this section. It is about what anthropologists mean and what they try to achieve when they talk about nature-culture relations, and importantly, when they attempt to break dualism and attend to alternatives? From Scott’s (2015) point of view, the essence of the issue is misgrasped. He argues that fortifying relational nondualism against dualism leads to essentialism and extremism. Reading comparatively Scott with Holbraad and Pedersen (2017), we can see that they go in the same direction, both pinpoint the same problem and suggest similar corrections. Ontological models, or cosmogonic models, as is discussed by Scott, should not be a debate about truth, that is to say anthropologists should not be too invested with deploying the ontologically different concepts in rephrasing what our world is. When reading Kohn (2013)’s argument that forests think, there has been a moment of confusion for me.

So, how should we think with forests? How should we allow the thoughts in and of the nonhuman world to liberate our thinking? Forests are good to think because they themselves think. Forests think. I want to take this seriously, and I want to ask, what are the implications of this claim for our understandings of what it means to be human in a world that extends beyond us? (Kohn 2013, 21-22)

When Kohn is trying to liberate our thoughts on representation, what does this “we” mean? Does it refer to the people living on the banks of the Upper Napo, or the public or anthropologists? Scott, Holbraad and Pedersen would disapprove of an all-encompassing use of “we” here. They make the point of not centering ontological

debates around the truth of worlds clear from different perspectives. Scott (2015) argues against value-laden ethical assessments of ontological matters and points out the consequences of essentialism, as is echoed by Latour and Graeber. Latour (1993) disagrees with the use of nature-society distinction and suggests leaving it for empirical findings to answer whether the conceptual scheme should be used. Graeber (2015) suggests not favoring any conceptual scheme of nature and culture over others. Holbraad and Pedersen (2017) analyze the issue methodologically, dealing with reflexivity, conceptualization and experimentation. They argue that the ontological turn is not a rupture from anthropology in the past, rather a continuation of old anthropological reflections and self-critiques about representations and an offer of new opportunities to innovate anthropological conceptualizations, which allows ethnographic materials to change their anthropological conceptualizations.

The ethnographic realities in my research report how research participants with both ethnic Finnish background and immigrant backgrounds relate to nature, namely being in nature, feeling nature, thinking with nature and practice with nature. I take nature and culture to be natureculture (Haraway 2008). Haraway's "natureculture" is about historical, heterogeneous "mutually interconnected webs of relationships that are always in motion" (Haraway 2008, 388). It helps to think about agency, power, difference, ontology, epistemology and so on. Although this is a more-than-human conceptualization, humans also have their naturecultures (Haraway 2008, 290). This thesis deals with the specific "naturecultures" of people's ways of relating to nature in everyday life in East Helsinki analytically, taking the debates about ontology as a methodological and heuristic reminder in conducting research, in understanding unusual differences. It is true that the discussions of the ontological turn are valuable in helping anthropologists understand differences. But the critique is also clear that some of the most pressing and significant issues that indigenous peoples face should not be overshadowed by the conceptual focus on issues like "trees and spirits", as those pressing, material concerns should be emphasized (Bessire and Bond 2014). This is true not only for indigenous peoples, but also for immigrants in East Helsinki. The thesis tries to achieve an understanding of important matters existing out of the narrow debates of nature-culture relations as ideas, and to reflect on nature-culture relations

generated in practices at the same time. Getting exercised with nature-culture dualism or nondualism can help to achieve an understanding of the important matters that are meaningful in the given ethnographic context one works in: matters that really matters for the research participants, which in this case as I will argue in the coming chapters, is the positioning of people with immigrant backgrounds in interplaying naturecultures and society in Finland which turns out to be about making and crossing boundaries. Seeing nature and culture as “naturecultures”, and not seeing nature and society as two separate worlds give anthropologists a point to start, although it is somehow preliminary because it does not begin from ethnography yet. Adopting the approach does not mean the anthropologist has chosen nondualism over dualism. Because to a certain degree, nature and culture have never really been divided. Nature-culture divide is a western modernist ontology that did not even work in describing the experience of people living in medieval Europe (Vaisman 2013). It is also because taking nature-culture as non-divided keeps the door open to all possibilities of “nature-culture” in the field, to grasp the important ethnographic issues about nature, culture and society. My fieldwork suggests the importance of understanding the nature-culture articulation and non-dualism. For many immigrants, nature-society is not divided. Their experiences of the natural environment and social environment are not separated. Nature also gives rise to different social practices that make and undo boundaries of social relations in people's relating to others and understanding others. Seeing nature and culture as “naturecultures” does not mean either that nondualism should be viewed as better than dualism or an antidote that solves all problems. Different from the popular arguments against the nature-culture divide in ascribing the many contemporary crises to it, the study shows that it should not be a general belief that taking nature and culture to be two separate things is the opposite of solutions. Because of the patchiness of how diverse subjects relate to other subjects and objects, and the multiplicities of scales, practical solutions and political pursuits are impossible to be tied in a certain way with certain intellectual, conceptual categories. Politically, the thesis suggests keeping “nature” as a concept separate from a “culture of nature” that is tied to Finnish national character. My finding is that what counts as nature is actually not fixed and timeless, but is much more flexible and shifting a category – and being so, there is a possibility of

reframing it to be more inclusive than it is currently in Finnish nationalist discourse. Highlighting the nature-culture articulation and calling for a “separation” do not contradict each other, because the former speaks to the ethnographic findings, and the latter speaks to political implications and solutions. What constitutes nature and what constitutes society are outcomes of complex negotiations between people and objects (Latour 1993; 2004; 2005). People in my field understand and experience nature differently. The experience varies, which does not exclusively distinguish immigrants from the so-called “Finns”, but immigrants are a group to pay attention to, and it is what the paper is trying to do, to explore how Finnish nature and immigrants in Finland interact with each other, which has implications for nationhood, citizenship, belonging, and racism. As is suggested by the title of the thesis, Finnish nature is “patchy”. More precisely, it is people’s relations with nature in Finland that are “patchy”. “Patchy” is borrowed from “patchy Anthropocene” (Tsing, Mathews, and Bubandt 2019), an approach to grasp and understand the globally uneven more-than-human landscape, ecological, social, economic, and political structures. Tsing’s “patchiness” can be compared to Haraway’s (2008) “situated” in understanding the historical and nature-cultural process of relating and becoming. “Patchiness” requires attention to diverse modes of knowing and modes of living (Tsing, Mathews, and Bubandt 2019; 192). This is what this thesis discusses. Patchy could be different than diverse, in that it does not only mean people’s experience is different, but also refers to an unevenness, that is different from the norm. It also suggests that different modes, practices have a relationship with each other.

People all live in this messy world, living in and interacting with natural and social environment and weave meanings, which makes sense through the multiple systems including political economy to “rub up against each other” (Tsing, Mathews, and Bubandt 2019). Ontology could be only a small part of it. The realities in which people live and about which people think and have feelings is continually co-created; it is not that there is a single truth, either about the world or about the people who live in it; it is more that there is ongoing work to make things into what they are. And that implies that the borders between cultures, between places, between nature and culture are negotiable.

This research highlights the importance of taking undoing nature-culture divide seriously in thinking about the articulation of nature and Finnishness. It reaches an understanding that in Finland, nature serves as a boundary between immigrants and “Finns”, because the ways people relate to it both make and negotiate differences: thus, making and breaking various boundaries. To be precise, it is not nature that is a boundary, but people’s perceptions and experience of it make and unmake it. Nature as a concept is politically useful in constituting the modern nation state (Rayner and Heyward 2015), managing citizens and society (McElwee 2016), and nature-based integration has recently been proposed and discussed as a solution for immigrant integration in Nordic countries³. The Finnish Environment Institute, Nordic Council of Ministers' Terrestrial Ecosystem Group (TEG) and Department of Knowledge and Welfare have a nature integration project called ORIGIN: Outdoor recreation, nature interpretation and integration in Nordic countries⁴. It states that “One of the key characteristics across all Nordic societies is a lifestyle which highly values active outdoor recreation and living close to nature – even in urban areas. We have traditionally had a very distinctive human-nature relationship characterized by, for instance, the public right of access to natural areas, foraging traditions and appreciation of natural and rural landscapes and pastoral traditions.” It aims at highlighting the role of nature in the social integration of immigrants into the Finnish society and the enterprise is expressed as a response to “the recent influx of asylum seekers and refugees to Nordic countries”. There has been research discussing the differences between immigrants and non-immigrants in outdoor recreation participation, experiences of and relationships with nature, understanding and valuing nature in Finland and beyond (Puhakka, Pitkänen and Oinonen 2021; Kloek et al. 2018). While the quantitative study focusing on youths in Lahti, Finland points out that immigrants spend less time in nature than non-immigrants, it takes multiculturalization of relations with nature as a framework and a solution. This is a simplification of understanding how immigrants relate to nature: it sees nature as certain given space, infrastructures and activities, and integration in

³ [Nature as a solution for immigrant integration in Nordic countries | Externwebben \(slu.se\)](#)

⁴ [Finnish Environment Institute > ORIGIN: Outdoor recreation, nature interpretation and integration in Nordic countries \(syke.fi\)](#)

terms of nature is assumed to be a justifiable aspect of integration expected for immigrants. It does not address the relationships between immigrants and non-immigrants in their relating to nature. Living in a global patch where nature is really brought into the spotlight as a means of integration, this thesis discusses how intellectual inquiries into nature-culture relations can work as a foundation for ethical and political pursuits, which here are understood as decolonization, anti-racism and anti-speciesism.

Understanding migration issues from a posthuman perspective

Posthumanism is about rethinking the category of human. While it includes debates about how technology has reshaped the meaning of being a human being, the discussions of which is also called transhumanism, it addresses mainly the relation between humans and other-than-human beings and how the relation is reshaping our conception of humankind.

Posthumanism has posed new directions for migration studies in anthropology, including both humans and other-than-humans in a cognitive field and a common sociality. Difference and identity making are pivotal in understanding how this posthuman migration politics evolves and plays out. Entanglements of pines, mushrooms, and mushroom pickers can generate new possibilities of migration politics, as is described and interpreted by Anna Tsing (2012, 2015) through the supply chains of mushrooms: a new politics formed by transformative collaborations across differences. The new politics is striving for radical cosmopolitanism, in the assemblages of different people and different species. Holding a posthuman stance, this cosmopolitanism has a great capacity of inclusion that it is not just for humans, but for other-than-human species as well. This is starkly innovative and powerful enough to call for new political hope and futuristic alternatives that all can anticipate: despite differences, mushroom pickers are able to negotiate more flexible access to the forest (compared with the access under the industrial regimes of the forest) and it slows down the human disturbance in the forest as well. There are two layers inherent in this cosmopolitanism. One is for humans, with variations of gender, race, ethnicity, class, life history, convictions, pursuits, emotions etc. The other one unfolds in the relationship between humans and

non-human animals. In this radical politics, radical love and care is in play. Different ethnic groups — Hmong, Mien, Lao, Khmer and white Americans assemble to hold and aim for communal goals and common agendas, which leads to freedom from ownership and surveillance asserted by Tsing. Their negotiations for rights are also made possible by these mushroom pickers as a coalition to the authorities who own the property. The difference leads to something great: a political alliance and coalition in pursuit of the same freedom agendas and identity building, which benefits pickers and the environment. This is also exemplified in the orchid fable invoked by Tsing. The relationship between orchids and fungus is such an assemblage of “messmates” (Haraway 2007). She is innovative in looking at assemblages of different people from both pericapitalism and capitalism, “joined up” by different species including matsutake, which has its own agency too. For Tsing, difference is the foundation of transformative collaborations, and these alterative collaborative politics grow out of differences.

The posthuman migration politics may be a hopeful form of cosmopolitan politics, but it could also be frustrating. Donna Haraway (2008) and Jean and John Comaroff (2001) approach the differences by discussing the connection between speciesism and racism together with citizenship. They both deal with the issue mainly from the perspective of “thinking”, precisely, focusing on the common cognitive structures and the logic of representation. Haraway (2008) explains the inherent connection between animals and humans in thinking about classification, identity and social distinction through the interrogation of the concept “species”. The word species, in Haraway’s view, is a “discursive tie between the colonized, the enslaved, the noncitizen, and the animal — all reduced to type, all others to rational man, and all essential to his bright constitution — is at the heart of racism and flourishes, lethally, in the entrails of humanism” (18). She argues that “species reeks of race and sex; and where and when species meet, that heritage must be untied, and better knots of companion species attempted within and across differences” (18). Comaroff investigates the interrelation between speciesism and racism besides citizenship subject to governmentality by analyzing South Africa’s alleged environmental catastrophe caused by invasive, alien plant species, at least that is the popular explanations offered by the

state and that dominate the press. There is a duet of the dominant public discourse and interpretation that blames invasive alien plants for the Cape Town fire because they burn more easily and severely than native flora and the perception of threats to the nation from people immigrating to the country. The demonization of alien species and immigrant racism and ethnic-based politics are parallels that both work for nation making. The operating mechanism that links them is about achieving the same sense by "implicit associations and organic intuitions ". And this is the new form of politics characterized by "naturalization" in the politics of the postcolony. The racism implied here is about where people, plants and animals are from (from beyond the borders of South Africa), not only about their biological condition: the idea of invasive species is that their biological condition belongs elsewhere and not here. This aspect of racism - which is extremely common (e.g., the common racist comment that people who look different should "go back to where they came from") is often overlooked. Yet when discussing alien species and migration, it is an essential aspect of the whole debate.

One idea on other-than-human beings brought by the posthumanist turn in Anthropology is to see non-humans as more than representations of human culture and society. Although the Comaroffs did touch upon the logging livelihood that connect immigrants and alien plants, the "practicing" part is not given enough attention. This is where Ghassan Hage's contributions to more-than-human politics fit in. Hage (2017) highlights the necessity of "practicing" to understand the similarity between racism and environmental crisis. Distinct from Comaroff's approach that treats environmental crisis and racism as two related domains that are symbolically associated, Hage adopts Ingold's idea that society and environment is the same, so that racism and environmental crisis come out of the same arena and the two structure each other. Instead of taking speciesism as speaking out on racism and citizenship struggles as a social phenomenon, he discusses from the other direction how racism reproduces environmental threats. Besides the similarity on the level of discourses, colonialism entails capitalist exploitation of people and resources, and "generalized domestication" is the key point Hage (2017) makes, which links racism and environmentalism.

Other-than-human beings are often present in immigrants' and non-immigrants' life world, constituting an important part of how they perceive and experience nature.

Following the “thinking” and “practicing” approach to a more-than-human migration politics, this thesis grasps the underlying analogy between speciesism and racism in the ethnographic context and depicts how humans and non-humans interact to reach an understanding of the positioning of immigrants in Finland in their attempts to navigate themselves through naturecultures. The patchy co-existence of exploitation, reciprocity and mutualism as modes of existence shows two things: 1) how for some immigrants, living in companionship with non-human animals becomes an important part of their settling in Finland, in terms of cultural adaptation; 2) how racism can arise from an emphasis on reciprocal and mutualist modes of being with non-human animals, which are prevalent as a “Finnish” way of relating taken for granted by some “Finns”.

Doing ethnography in East Helsinki

This thesis relies on ethnography to capture the experiences of people with immigrant backgrounds in Helsinki, mainly in East Helsinki (Itä-Helsinki).

Field sites

East Helsinki is an area in Helsinki, Finland, which comprises the city’s East and Southeast neighborhoods. It is an area without a clear border, as if you ask people in Helsinki whether a certain neighborhood on the border belongs to East Helsinki, chances are that opinions vary. Nevertheless, there are neighborhoods that are typically considered East-Helsinki such as Myllypuro, where I live, Itäkeskus, meaning East center, and Kontula, which is widely considered by residents in Helsinki and other areas of Finland as the worst neighborhood in Helsinki, and even Finland. I have chosen this area to focus on for several reasons. Initially, most immigrants distribute in Helsinki (Łobodzińska 2011), and East Helsinki is the area where immigrants and refugees are concentrated⁵. It has the highest proportion of immigrants in Helsinki (Kauppinen 2002; City of Helsinki, 2020). This makes the area a good place for conducting research

⁵ [East Helsinki - Wikipedia](#)

focusing on immigrants. Additionally, many Finnish people I spoke with consider East Helsinki an area riddled with problems: unemployment, poverty, immigrants, and refugees. “Immigrants and refugees” are listed as problems because many Helsinki people I talked to hold implicit attitudes of seeing these as undesirable. When I asked Aleksi, one Finnish young man living in Myllypuro, how he felt about living in Myllypuro, he talked about the lack of education in the area, and interestingly later, after some alcohol, he became more talkative and brought up “black people” without me asking anything about race or ethnicity: “I don’t mind black people, as long as they are not Somalians.” He recounted how once in his childhood he watched from his home window some Somalian kids licking a car bonnet: “How could anybody do that? I mean how stupid do you have to be to do something like that?”. The attitudes of seeing immigrants and refugees as “problems” can also be noted in how locations are made and experienced in East Helsinki: I was told it is an East Helsinki inside joke that Itis shopping mall⁶ should have foreign receptionists because all customers there are foreigners. Some Finnish people compare Itis with “Mogadishu” (also called “Little Somali”), a location and a slightly dangerous forbidden area said to exist in many East Helsinki neighborhoods. Many Finnish people living in different neighborhoods have introduced to me “Mogadishu” in their area. It is blocks of apartments where many Somalian people live. Immigrants make a big part of the Finnish residents’ experience of their environment. Back to “problematic” East Helsinki, some Finnish participants who live in other areas of Helsinki have not even set foot in this area, as in their eyes the area is inapproachable for its danger or whatsoever make it another world distant from their own. There is an interesting articulation of the area’s immigrant population and its problematic public image. The city of Helsinki also uses the term East Helsinki to refer to eastern neighborhoods. They call East Helsinki “the city’s widest and most diverse area⁷” The Helsinki authorities take the area two-sided: this is an area developing fast and shadowed with segregation and inequality in development and prosperity (Leppänen, personal communication, October 1, 2021). Furthermore, and equally importantly, East-Helsinki is an area remarkable for its abundance of “wild” nature and

⁶ in Itäkeskus.

⁷[Eastern neighbourhoods | My Helsinki](#)

an ideal place to travel from elsewhere in Helsinki for a recreational trip or an excursion into nature. Figure 2 shows the green infrastructure in the Helsinki Metropolitan area, and figure 3 is a map of the Helsinki Metropolitan area. Reading figure 2 and figure 3 together, one can see that East Helsinki has a higher density of nature than other parts of Helsinki. All the above-mentioned factors confluence to make East Helsinki a practical and ideal field site for answering my research questions about the ways people with immigrant backgrounds experience Finnish nature and the role of nature in shaping immigrants' positioning in Finland.

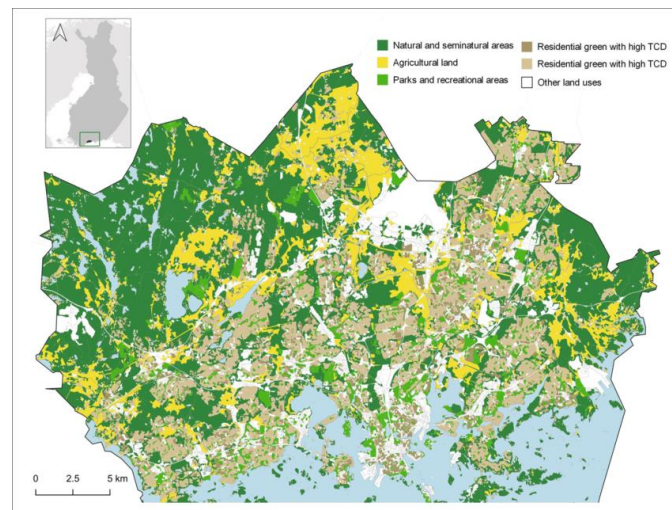


Figure 2. Helsinki's green infrastructure. Source: Korpilo, Silviya, Kajosaari, Anna, Rinne, Tiina, Hasanzadeh, Kamyar, Raymond, Christopher and Kyttä, Marketta. 2021. "Coping With Crisis: Green Space Use in Helsinki Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Frontiers in Sustainable Cities*." 3. 10.3389/frsc.2021.713977.

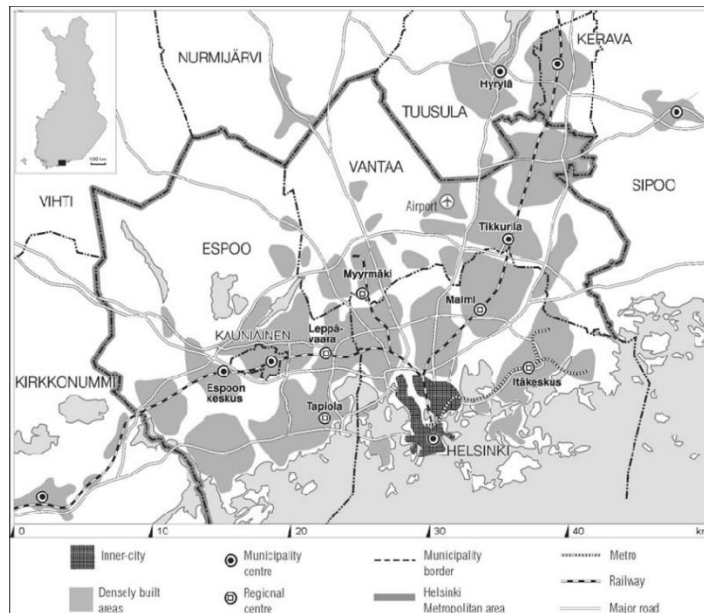


Figure 3. The Helsinki Metropolitan Area includes the municipalities of Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa and Kauniainen. Source: Vaattovaara, Mari & Kepsu, K. & Bernelius, V. & Eskelä, Elina. 2009. "Helsinki: An Attractive Hub of Creative Knowledge? The views of high-skilled employees, managers and transnational migrants."

Data collection

Between October 2021 and August 2022 (the intensive fieldwork started in January 2022), I conducted participant observations and interviews with forty residents in Helsinki, most of whom live in East Helsinki. I posted recruitment ads in Facebook groups of the eastern neighborhoods, gave out hand-written ads randomly to over 100 mailboxes, reached out to friends, neighbors, professionals (a city official, a university lecturer and an artist) and participated in immigrant group events to recruit research participants. For observations conducted in a natural environment without preliminary agreement, I initiated conversations and invited people to join my research.

Besides a few interviews that were short and quick in the ethnographic setting, most of them are in-depth semi-structured interviews that lasted from one hour to more than three hours. I have also had the opportunity to do follow up or multiple interviews with some of my research participants. Remembering Ingold's (2000) contention that society and environment cannot be separated, I deliberately tried to at first engage the participants in sharing their life experiences with no pre-set distinction between social

experience and experience of nature. It worked well because I was able to comprehend the place of nature from their perspectives without directing them to the subject in the first place. Most talked about nature without me asking and from some I specifically asked about their relation to nature. Subsequently, I followed their thoughts and encouraged them to freely express their experiences and opinions of nature in Finland. The interviews spanned life histories, family ties, daily life routines, social interactions, personal challenges, and struggles, thoughts about social issues, ways of perceiving and relating to the natural environment in Finland and elsewhere (e.g., their home countries), including other-than-human animals, plants, and materials. Semi-structured interviews enabled me to go along with the truly meaningful things for the participants and concentrate on the research subject. The topics covered in my interviews are diverse, but I gave emphasis to the topic of nature when conducting the interviews to understand the topic thoroughly and answer my research questions. Practically, interviews were conducted in several ways: remotely on Zoom, voice call, video call, in-person at the participant's place or in public places including a "natural" environment. In the earlier stages of data collection, interviews were often online because of the restrictions of Covid-19. Starting from March 2022, interviews were mostly conducted face-to-face. The interviews were conducted in English, Finnish, Mandarin Chinese and occasionally assisted by Google translate. Some interviews were recorded upon my participants' permission and others were recorded by note-taking during or immediately after the interview. The recorded interviews were transcribed within a few days. I clarified my status as a student researcher from the University of Helsinki writing an anthropological thesis to all participants. They know my research topic, aims and scope, and are aware that the final thesis will be reviewed and uploaded to the school library. We also negotiated together how to ensure the anonymity of the participants. All names used in this thesis are given pseudonyms, except using a university professor's real name.

Participant observations play a key role in my data collection. I was able to collect richer data and gained deeper insights into people's life: seeing people interacting with nature and other people can be more fruitful than merely listening to what they had to say about their natural and social environment. Given East Helsinki as a spatial

ethnographic context this research looks at, I conducted multi-sited participant observations in some of the eastern neighborhoods: Myllypuro, Itäkeskus, Kontula, Kivikko, Vuosaari, Puotila and Kalasatama. Among these, Myllypuro, Kontula, Kivikko, Vuosaari and Puotila are the ones that in which I invested the most. This selection reflects diversity from a “native” point of view of many non-immigrant Finnish residents. As far as many East Helsinki residents are concerned, which have been reflected in some interviews, Myllypuro is a typical, but a normal and even a good neighborhood in the east, and Kontula is the worst neighborhood in the area and even in the whole of Helsinki. Puotila is slightly better than Kontula. Vuosaari is a good neighborhood. Kalasatama has an ambiguous status as East Helsinki neighborhood because there is a lot of new development in the area, and so a more mixed population of residents in terms of income and social status.

The participant observations took place over the course of the study. They include the following.

1) Observations of Puotila community gardens. I carried out participant observations and ethnographic interviews with six families. With two families I did multiple participant observations. One family always messaged me to give a notice whenever they were going to attend to their allotments or whenever there are some activities taking place. I could follow their progress as time passed. It was particularly fascinating to see how flowers blossomed, plants flourished, and animals energized in a place turned into a lively world from the icy land in the early spring. The same is true of the other family. I stood or sat in their gardens, observed their practices, and talked about what they were doing. There were also moments of relaxation when I joined their family and friend gatherings in the field. The conversations in the garden not only provided me with information directly related to their gardening work, but also stories and narratives to do with their lives on a more general level.

2) Participant observations at Kontula community center (Stadin asukastalo Kontula). From March 2022 to May 2022, I visited the center two to three times a week, attending an art group on Tuesday and a Finnish language course organized by an NGO on Wednesday. At other times I spontaneously visited the community center to see who they are and what they are doing. Even though this is an indoor space which is not

directly relevant to the experience of nature, the findings have proved to be rich and fruitful for several reasons. Firstly, the dynamic of nature-culture plays out in the arena motivated by the community center and can be witnessed in various happenings. Secondly, the community center is a grand living room for a diverse population, and I was able to connect with immigrants and invite them to participate in my project.

3) Observations and ethnographic interviews at Vuosaari, Myllypuro, Kontula, Kivikko, Itäkeskus, Kalasatama and Pukinmäki. I concentrated on how people go about their everyday lives, how they are connected and disconnected to nature, be it forest, lawn, garden, beach, or non-human animals.

Data analysis

I wrote field notes after the observations each day. The field notes contain a detailed description of what I have observed together with my comments and preliminary findings. I used Evernote, a notetaking software to write my fieldnotes and they were eventually put together in Microsoft Word. I transcribed the interview audios using the verbatim transcription method, meaning that I wrote down every single word including interjections and pauses. The audios were transcribed mostly by listening to the full recordings, and some were transcribed using the “Transcribe” function of Microsoft Word. But the transcripts acquired this way needed a double check, because the software is not intelligent enough to convert audio to text flawlessly. The field notes comprising of observation notes, interview transcripts and photos add up to over 200 A4 pages in Microsoft Word. I organized them in chronological order.

The analytical process already started in the process of data collection. The preliminary findings helped drive the data collection forward, and I made sure they did not restrict the succeeding collection. When the fieldwork was finished in the beginning of August, the final analysis started and lasted for two weeks. I used the method of interpretative analysis (I also used content analysis and discourse analysis). I searched for meanings and especially repetitive patterns of meanings found in multiple interviews and observations. Multiple units of meanings emerged, and by re-reading and organizing these units I managed to identify the key themes. This was a spiral-like process: I switched from re-reading materials to building meanings, structures, and themes, and

they give shape to each other continuously. Meanings and themes give rise to reflections and some novel thoughts about concepts. I wrote important findings down throughout the process.

The Chapters

The thesis includes four chapters besides this introduction chapter. It invites readers to see how people with immigrant backgrounds and people who identify themselves as Finnish traverse the naturecultures in Helsinki, especially East Helsinki. In the moments of encounters and isolation, people with immigrant backgrounds are constantly making and being restricted by boundaries of many kinds, symbolic, material, and spatial. The study discusses what nature has to do with these. As a matter of fact, a key argument of the thesis is that in Finland, nature plays a significant role in immigrants' positionings. Nature as "a distinctly Finnish way of living" works as a boundary between immigrants and non-immigrants, and between otherness and Finnishness. Nature also offers opportunities to people to make the boundaries negotiable by forming social relations and collective responsibilities in their relating to nature. The thesis focuses on a negotiable set of boundaries. It proposes an alternative understanding of Finnish nature that is open-ended, and this alternative can only be realizable when we take a serious look at the nature-culture dynamics with an ontologically open mind and an epistemologically critical mind.

Chapter 2 examines Finnish representations of nature as a distinctly Finnish way of living and the ways residents in East-Helsinki, especially those with immigrant backgrounds perceive and experience Finnish nature. It shows how taking an ontological approach can help with understanding nature-culture in the field. It shows that ontological assumptions are not necessarily coherent in terms of contexts or classifications such as ethnicity and culture. Anyway, people live together in a messy world and interact with their environment. The nature people with immigrant backgrounds experience can be very different from the one represented by Finnish authorities and ordinary Finnish people. Finnish nature provides something to make and cross boundaries, demarcating otherness from belonging. This chapter discusses

the idea of cultural citizenship when it is nature themed and the dangers of a conventional representation of nature as a way of living in Finland.

Chapter 3 closely follows Chapter 2 and further discusses how residents, particularly immigrants, experience Finnish nature, by concentrating on their engagements in community allotments. It shows how the key “nature” services offered by the City of Helsinki turn out to be a field where people actively interact with naturecultures, innovatively cultivate their identities and social relationships. When it comes to gardening, there is a difference between immigrants’ “labor” and Finnish people’s “leisure”. People make boundaries drawing on what they understand nature to be, how others and themselves relate to nature, and by their own practices of relating to nature and other people. But people’s relating to nature also enables communication and moving across boundaries: ethnicity, race, culture, language.... Communications go beyond language and can be seen as representations, drawing on Kohn’s (2013) theory on representation. These stand in contrast with the conventional representation analyzed in Chapter 2. The contrast suggests further the problems of the rigid representation of living close to nature as a Finnish way of living.

Chapter 4 delves into the more-than-human entanglements, practiced by residents with immigrant backgrounds, Finnish identity, the City of Helsinki, and a specialist in alien species. The entanglements refer to the scientific management, and legal regulation of alien species, care and exploitation found in the companionships between humans and more-than-human species, and between humans. It elaborates how some animals can be exploited if they don’t do multiple boundary crossings simultaneously: crossing the conceptual boundary demarcating alienness from indigeneity when crossing the national borders or the boundary of domesticated and wildness. Immigrants can also face exploitation if they don’t do multiple boundary crossings simultaneously: crossing the “boundary of nature as a way of living” in terms of the right Finnish ways to relate to animals in the eyes of many Finnish people and regulated by laws, after crossing the national borders to come and live in Finland. Immigrants can also face exploitation even in intimate relationship if they are trapped in the category of otherness. The chapter argues why an animal can be a person and a thing at the same time and how this way of thinking might contribute to undermining

racism and speciesism, by challenging the normalization of the boundaries mentioned above.

The conclusion chapter argues that nature is one of the many “locating regimes” (Green 2019; 2022) that locate immigrants and make Finland. It can make immigrants misplaced. It summarizes the main takeaway from the thesis and gives the arguments on nature-culture relations seen in the field. It highlights the importance of understanding the nature-culture articulation. Nature gives rise to different social practices that make and undo boundaries of social relations in people's relating to others and understanding others; in this sense, social relations mediate between nature and culture in the ethnographic context. Nature-culture is non-divided. It also suggests the thesis's political inquiries: it is better for nature to be a negotiation of boundary instead of a boundary itself. To achieve this, the representation and idea of “nature as a Finnish way of living” could be detached from the concepts of Finnish nationhood, ethnicity and citizenship. The patchiness of Finnish nature, more precisely, people's relations to Finnish nature, need not be flattened. Racism could also be understood from the perspective of spatial locations. It requires recognizing that people and animals judged by racism and speciesism in Finland are in the right places, not misplaced. Namely, they should belong here.

Chapter 2 Nature as a Distinctly Finnish Way of Living

It is possible that when Mauno, a 28-year-old Finnish man, put on the video of Jean Sibelius's *Finlandia* on December 6, 2021 (Finnish Independence Day), as one of the first things he did that day, he did not give much reflective thoughts to why the symphonic poem is accompanied with scenes of Finnish landscape. Search on Google “*Finlandia Sibelius*” and see what you get. The first result is a video with a cover of forests and open waters, a typical Finnish landscape. In sequence, the 9-minute video includes the view of Finland from space, snowy forests in Lapland, gorgeous dancing northern lights with sparking stars in the night sky, sunrise in forest, forest and lake, a goldeneye sea duck (Telkkä) parent and babies, bear cubs and parent, islands, close

shoots of sea duck babies jumping out of caves into water, a bear walking in orange sunset, bear cubs climbing a tree, swamps, a crowd of cattle wandering freely, autumn shades, crow and arctic loon (Kuikka), and flying squirrels (Liito-orava). The video closes with an Osprey (Sääksi) catching a fish. How come this piece of song, written by the widely regarded nation's greatest composer, an expression of patriotism for "Finns" resorts to nature to make a seamless new expression of patriotism? This new expression of Finnish patriotism exists in Mauno's listening to it on the Independence Day. He told me this is his must-do on each year's Independence Day. It is an annual ritual for him.

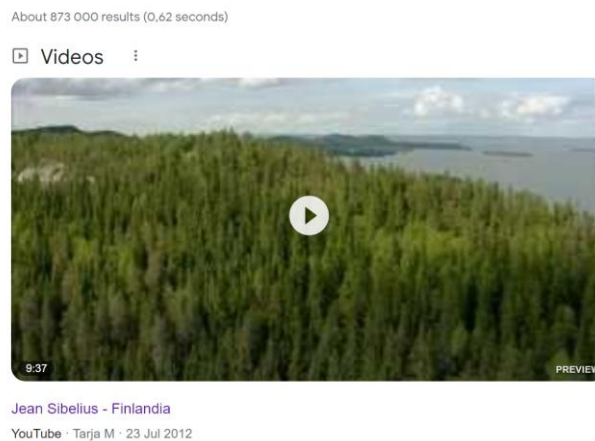


Figure 4. The first displayed video on Google searching "Finlandia Sibelius".

There are some questions to ask. How do nature and nationhood articulate with each other in Finland? How is "nature as a way of living in Finland" permeating in the official discourses and people's minds when it comes to the country? What does "nature as a Finnish way of living" leave out? And what are the implications? In this chapter, I seek to find explanations for the questions. I first take a closer look at the statement of nature as a Finnish way of life. By carrying out a brief content analysis of posts about nature on major Finnish organization's websites, I analyze the official representations of nature in Finland. I am not particularly looking at theoretical work on the idea of nature in Finnish nationalist rhetoric, but instead on what kinds of images of nature in relation to Finland the people I researched in East Helsinki would have had access to. Then I continue to the main body of this chapter: what could this representation of Finnish nature have missed out? I show that nature can be thought of and felt differently by

different people, particularly people with immigrant backgrounds. Nature and nature as a way of life can take a quite different shape. Nature as understood in the Finnish context, I argue, makes boundaries demarcating belonging and otherness, but it also has the potential to break boundaries through people's active boundary crossings.

Finns' pristine Finnish nature

International marketing and narratives of Helsinki municipality

A content and discourse analysis offers an excursion into the representations of Finnish nature by the authorities. Some common patterns and themes emerge.

Visit Finland is a department of Business Finland, concentrating on promoting tourism. Their website gives you an immersive experience of Finland, mostly Finnish nature. Most of the texts, photos, and videos are about natural scenery, a thing that “we”, as termed frequently on the website, take immense pride in. The first thing coming into sight on a visit to the website is a full-screen live image of someone cycling in the landscape steeped in autumn colors. The texts displayed on the image are particularly interesting: “The happiest country in the world: Happiness-it's in our nature.” This sets a tone for narrating Finland and travelling to Finland, and meanwhile forms a link between the status of Finland as the happiest country in the world and its nature. In fact, the emphasis of Finland as the happiest country appears frequently on the website, as a discourse actively evoked to delineate the Finnish nature and coat the Finnish nature with a glory of advanced social development. Visit Finland displays “Finnish nature” and “Finnish culture” of “we Finns” that explain the secrets of being the happiest.

Contents about nature make up most of the website's posts. The most frequently used words to address Finnish nature are “wild” and “pristine”. Visitors to Finnish Lapland are encouraged to get a sip of the clear stream water, which is not usually recommended. But in wild Finnish nature, it is desirable. National parks let people “experience the beauty of wilderness”, while they are founded as nature reserves with marked trails. A national park is hardly wild. The depictions of Finnish nature as pristine and wild aim to give potential visitors a feeling that nature in Finland is in an

undisturbed mode to offer them a feeling of disconnecting with other-than nature and reconnecting with nature. A post is titled “Reconnect with nature”. It also mentions that there is accessible nature just next door to Helsinki city, and it offers an amazing getaway. Nature is presented as an object standing in contrast to cities. Nature is something existing external to human bodies; it is a place to look for where one’s mind can be revitalized. A mind-body dichotomy is in alignment with the urban-rural dichotomy and the industrial-pristine dichotomy. According to Laura Kolbe, a professor of European history at the University of Helsinki, the urban-rural contrast in Finland has a long history, and it is driven by a national romanticism centering around national landscapes, especially lakes and forests⁸.

Finnish nature is also Finns’ nature. “Finns” is used many times, meaning ethnic Finns, while on some occasions accompanied with photos picturing people of other ethnicities and races. The article titled “The relaxation routine all Finns know-cottage, sauna, lakes” speaks in congruence with the statement “There’s no scene more Finnish than a cozy cottage by a lake surrounded by emerald, green forests.” There is some typical Finnish natural scene just as there are some typical Finns. This is another example: “We’ll be honest – not all Finns enjoy frozen swims. But those who do will vouch for the experience. For them, that moment of emerging from the water into the cold air is one of euphoria. Will ice swimming be your thing? There’s only one way to find out.” Finns are endowed with certain habits, preferences, behaviors, and ways of life. They are also the right people to lead visitors to experience Finnish nature, which serves as base of Finnish lifestyle and the unique Finnish culture. Searching “Finns” on Visit Finland, there are more than 50 results. Interestingly but maybe not surprisingly, the website even has a post “What are Finns like?” It tells us that: Finns are warm and sincere; Finns do not make small talk; Finns are modest, Finns love sauna... and most importantly, Finns love nature. “In Finland, nature is never far away, and Finns have a close connection with it. Getting away from civilization is greatly valued and walking in the woods is a simple, yet terrific way to collect and parse one’s thought.” This

⁸ [Erna Puomi, 23, thought that the hatred of Helsinki was an ancient whiff of history – Then she moved to Jyväskylä - Homeland | HS.fi](#)

paragraph summarizes the discussions above regarding both the nature of Finnish nature and Finnish population. When the articulation with nature in Finland is concerned, only ethnic Finns matter! As for others... they are non-existent or simply have disappeared, in a way as is recommended by Visit Finland to visitors: “leave nothing but footprints behind”.

Business Finland, the Finnish government organization for funding and trade, promotion of travel and investment, also strategically take Finnish nature as an attraction for international business. The same is true for Study in Finland. Yu and Qi, who are master's students in Helsinki from China, told that one big reason of them coming to study in Finland is the special charm of Finnish nature and atmosphere. They have long had a dream to see Northern lights in North Europe. Finland, in their eyes, is a winter wonderland.

Nature is also incorporated in the municipal governmental structure. The city of Helsinki has an environmental department that concentrates on increasing the diversity of urban nature, environmental services, and biosecurity management. Different from Visit Finland who focuses specifically on the beauty of nature and enjoying nature as a lifestyle, the City of Helsinki has more concerns when it comes to nature. When nature is emphasized as essential for Finnish lifestyle, it is part of the everyday governing.

Nature as a pivotal constitution of Finnish nationhood

Nature as a way of living is part of the Finnish collective consciousness. Maria, a 32-year-old Finnish woman, tells me although she is not a really an outdoor person, “nature is inherent in Finland”.

When asked about the reasons why nature is important for Finnish people, Mauno says he thinks it is because nature is so easily accessible in Finland, and you do not have much else to do. Besides, he says, Finnish nature has four seasons, which makes it very colorful and offers a wide range of experience. “You can go skating in winter, enjoy the green color in spring, enjoy the summer and savoring leaves in autumn. Think about it, if you live in Singapore, how much can you do with nature?”

Probably one gets bored easily.” For Mauno, the beauty of Finnish nature lies in nature itself.

Latour (1991, 5) notes that " In the eyes of our critics the ozone hole above our heads, the moral law in our hearts, the autonomous text, may each be of interest, but only separately." He explained alternatively the political and social roots of the notion of nature. Finnish nature cannot be carved as a separate value-free zone. The way nature is appreciated is not just about nature. The lakes, the forests and everything else have everything to do with politics. Establishing the idea of “nature as a way of living” produces representations and practices of nation-making. This collective representation is symbolic and is materially significant. It defines Finnishness, in terms of the landscape and people. It also secures the attraction by turning the beauty of nature into “fictitious commodities” (Polanyi 1944) embedded in global capitalism. When nature becomes critical for national competence-building and profit-seeking, it joins the contemporary nation-making. It is a cultural and a political-economic matter.

Next the thesis discusses how people in the field, particularly those with an immigrant background perceive and experience Finnish nature.

Ontological variations

One understanding of ontology is about how things are and how things exist. It is about being and becoming. One anthropological concept of ontology concerns how things could be, namely, the multiple forms of existence constituted in concrete practices (Holbraad, Pedersen, and Viveiros de Castro, 2014). Nature-related ontological variations constitute an important part of the participants’ relatedness to nature. This section is relevant because the differences in their perceiving and experiencing nature stand in contrast with the nature-culture divide presented in the official representation of Finnish nature, as was analyzed earlier.

Xin studies in Helsinki. He immigrated from China to Finland to live with his Finnish husband. He explains his experience of nature to me.

I live in Kulosaari. The natural environment is excellent. It takes only a few minutes to walk to the seaside. The winter here is super long. I enjoy looking at green plants and

dislike the white ones. For me...the moments only come when there is “天时地利人和” (favorable timing, geographical and human conditions). When the morning sunlight spreads through the grass field, it is the moment the camera captures at the same time. I often jog in forests. Sometimes trees can sing. There are very few people. There is a sense of unknowingness. It has the magic to heal. There are many small animals here, and this is precious when cities around the world are urbanized and industrialized. It is always delightful to see those small kangaroos running next to you in the grass, making the sounds. There are so many of them. You can spot a group of them eating grass and jumping around...These kangaroos can be frightened by humans whatever we do, even when we just try to be friendly. It is just nice to keep the harmony of nature. Nature’s harmony and human-nature harmony are different. Nature was originally harmonious. Any human actions towards nature can lead to dissonance. Right now, nature is not harmonious, but nature is powerful: it can restore itself. Humans do things to make humans live, and to live in harmony with nature with limited natural resources...Wait a minute! Isn’t human part of nature? Yes, humans are a part of nature. In many years and in the long term, nature will become nature again, but I don’t think humans will reappear.

-Interview with Xin, January 2022

This is an informative and thought-provoking description of Xin’s relation to nature. How does he perceive, experience and generalize nature? There are multiple ontological assumptions that co-exist, fulfill and contradict each other. Descola (2005) proposes a framework, the “four ontologies”— animism, totemism, naturalism, and analogism—to explain all the ways people relate themselves to nature. Drawing on the four basic ontological regimes to make sense of the multiplicity in Xin’s case, there is at least “naturalism” in his seeing nature as an external existence and “analogism” in his claim of “天时地利人和” (Tiānshí dìlì rén hé). Descola (2005) argues that other ontological modes can emerge and co-exist with the locally dominant ontological mode, therefore generating variations that are called cultural differences. The “cultural differences” I am talking about in this section are the differences in some people’s perceiving and experiencing nature, which stand in contrast with the nature-culture divide/ “naturalism” presented in the official representation of Finnish nature. Xin enjoys Finnish nature and experiences it in an interactive and intersubjective way. His subtle bodily sensations are contingent upon the self-environment interactions. “天时地利人和” (Tiānshí dìlì rén hé) comes from ancient Chinese philosophy. It literally means winning a war entails meeting three requirements simultaneously: good weather conditions, geographical advantage and unitedness of people. The expression is used on

many occasions suggesting the deep logic running in traditional Chinese cosmology, which emphasizes “天人合一” (Tiān rén hé yī, meaning human and nature is one and the same). It does not separate a human from the external environment. The body is an integral part of nature and instead of being a psychical, close-ended entity, it is perpetually open and porous as Qi (气) comes and goes. Qi, the key concept in Chinese philosophy, can mean air concerning “天时” (Tiānshí), it could be understood as flows or momentums that everything, including a human can possess and harness. Qi is simultaneously physically real and spiritually invisible, Qi as a dynamic can describe and explain natural events; the human body internalizes Qi as an organic state, which synchronously connects all beings in the universe (Rošker 2018, 127-128). This connection is not a physical one, considering that Qi also means mind, spirit, manner, character, personality, moral, ethics and so much more. Interiority and exteriority/physicality are not differentiated in the first place. Interiority is not the naturalist interiority but the “interiority of immanence” (Ingold 2016, 11). When Xin emphasizes the indescribable moments that speak to a material-spiritual unitedness and unknowable, the ontological backbone of material-symbolic, body-mind, and nature culture do not exist. The kangaroos Xin talks about are in fact hares. After asking whether the animal he mentions is hare, he says: “Oh yes, they are. I thought they were kangaroos...the color and the long leg.” A hare does not need to be a hare conceptually. It does not need to take the form of a “Leporidae” (the family of rabbits and hares). Be it kangaroos or anything else, it does not influence Xin to interact with them the same way and shift the perspective to momentarily see through these creatures’ eyes to evaluate humans’ behaviors. The Linnaean taxonomy is the underlying language by which the whole thing is spoken of, but in Xin’s case the classification’s accuracy plays very little role in the substantial matter, in how Xin and the kangaroo/ hare become with each other. However, categorization constitutes the process of his taking the creatures as kangaroos, by their colors and the length of legs (see figure 5). If I had never told him that it might be a hare, Xin could maybe never know it is a “Leporidae”. Moving to his opinions about human-nature harmony, Xin jumps in and out of the distinction and

separation between nature and humans. Xin appears to be combining Chinese and Finnish ontological approaches towards nature.



Figure 5. A little kangaroo and a little hare. Do they look the same? Are they the same? As far as natural sciences are concerned, they are different species. Source: Bing images.

How to conceptualize the ontological mix? It is difficult to assert that Xin lives in multiple ontological worlds or universes. What does it mean in practice? Can he be in one world again and in a second travel to another? This conceptualization does not help much with understanding the nature-culture differences (Heywood 2017). Reflecting on myself, I realized that I have occasionally unconsciously reposition something to adjust fengshui (风水) for my benefit in my daily life. For example, repositioning scissors to point at the ground, rather than pointing at my bedroom or my two neighbors before sleep to guarantee peaceful sleeping. Does this mean for a moment I live in a world of analogism? If this was learnt by my socialization, it does not mean that I possess a certain representation scheme before I stepped into that very moment. The same is true for Xin, who might have gone through a socialization process like me in many ways, does not entertain multiple representation schemes prior to his moments of “becoming with” (Haraway 2008) others and simultaneously becoming himself. And it is in those spatial-temporal transitions and moves that he, together with others, where a relational nature is concerned, lives with multiple ontological systems that can be identified by an anthropologist as analogism, naturalism and so on (e.g., Descola 2005).

The same is true for Juhani, a 30-year-old Finnish man and my neighbor living in Myllypuro. One afternoon I was invited to his place for interviews, there came a hare (“rusakko” in Finnish) under the window. He immediately came up, opened the fridge

and took out a carrot. “For Mr. Rusakko,” he said, “he sometimes comes here, and I usually throw him a carrot.” He opened the window and threw the carrot next to Mr. Rusakko. The hare stood still and became alerted, as if nothing had happened but meanwhile something happened. His sense of smell guided him to the carrot, not the eyesight. Shortly after, he began to chew his carrot happily. “What a nice snack for him. The carrot fell from the sky. It just popped up!”, saying this, he got a carrot for himself, peeled it and started to eat. He stood in front of the window, facing the hare, eating a carrot when the hare was eating a carrot. They gazed at each other, and both concentrated on eating the same thing. It was a very interesting moment, quiet but surreal. Juhani said: “Now I know how it feels to be a rabbit.” Referring to a hare as “Mr.” is anthropomorphism, an arguably naturalistic propensity. Nonetheless, Juhani and the hare are in a world of becoming, rather than a world of being. They stared at each other and were at the present instant consuming the same food. In order to understand better whether his experience was a matter of imagination or a physical one, I contacted him again to ask about his experience afterwards. He told me: “I feel connected to nature, because we are doing exactly the same thing with rusakko: eating carrots. Since rusakko is always immediately going to the carrot when it is thrown to him, I am pretty sure rusakko enjoyed the carrot and I also enjoy the carrot. We enjoy it similarly. I would be a bit interested to know how rusakko tastes it. Everything makes me feel closer to nature. It would not have felt this way if I was just watching, not eating carrots as well.” Tasting the same food, Juhani is interested to know more about how it feels to be a hare, momentarily his being as a man swung open and became fluid. What happened was slightly deviant from the track of naturalism.

People’s experience told me that conceptual frames do not exist before the interacting moments of “becoming with” in a spatiotemporal moment. Instead of getting confused between traveling either plural ontological worlds or moving between plural distinct epistemological schemes, it makes sense to reconceptualize the pluralities and contradictions by focusing on the experience unfolding spontaneously at moments that join substance and structure together.

The stories of Xin and Juhani show that there are different ways of being in Finland and perceiving Finnish nature, other than what are presented in the official

representation and popular discourses: taking nature as an objective existence external to human bodies and a place to look for where one's mind can be revitalized. The next session delves into the world of natureculture experienced by the participants.

Naturecultures in the field

Learning Finnish and painting Finnish nature

Kontula community center (Stadin asukastalo Kontula) is one of the two community centers in East Helsinki. According to the city of Helsinki, Community centers are residents' living rooms and meeting facilities, aiming at promoting residents' well-being and preventing their loneliness by offering group activities and events⁹. Among all nine community centers in Helsinki, Kontula is one of the two that give special emphasis to immigrants¹⁰. Under the title "For immigrants", it lists the group events intended for immigrants only and specifies different targeted ethnic groups. Kontula community center looks like an "immigrant hub". Standing on the shopping mall square close to the Kontula metro station, it is truly a busy living room for Finnish people and (Finnish) people with immigrant backgrounds.

The first thing one sees in the center is a notice on the door: "Discrimination-free zone: no form of discrimination is allowed in this space." Concomitantly, the term "monikulttuurisuus" (multiculturalism) is on the wall (see figure 6). These set a tone for the community, as a place characteristic of diversity, intended to ensure and achieve equality between different groups, especially in terms of ethnicities. How is multiculturalism defined and practiced in the community center? And what has nature to do with this?

⁹ [Community centres | City of Helsinki](#)

¹⁰ [Eastern Helsinki | City of Helsinki](#)



Figure 6. The “multiculturalism” notice hanging on the wall with information sheets about various events.

The community center’s layout resembles an apartment. A large living room, dining area and kitchen, and meeting rooms all blend in one space. Many visitors told me it is like a home! People come here for activities, coffee, and most importantly, to be social. Almost every day, the sofas and dining table were occupied. There is often a group of visitors self-identified as Iranian sitting in the sofas and having lively conversations. Most of them are unemployed women dressed in traditional clothes, chatting over a cup of tea. The language they speak, the clothes they wear, the way they are seated, in a meeting circle with a “family-style” feel, and the loud sound of speaking and laughing make a strong foreign presence. This meeting is their daily routine, an important program to bond with others with a similar ethnic background.

At Kontula community center, one can join weekly groups: art groups, Finnish language groups (see figure 6), poem group, chair game group and so on... There were two art groups, differentiated based on painting types. The group I joined used oil painting sticks. The subject matter of the first group is nature, and the second group animals. Intriguingly, only people with an ethnic Finnish identity participate in the art groups and the poem group. People with immigrant backgrounds, although they are often seen at the community center, only participate in Finnish language learning activities and the daily socialization mentioned above. The noticeable sign of

“multiculturalism” on the wall seems to suggest where non-ethnic Finnish people belong, in a differentiated engagement in nature-culture. The subject of painting is “luonto” (nature): that is how they say it. The teacher and participants chose the theme together. Nature in this case is constituted by the artistic engagement with flowers, trees, landscapes, seasons and so on. The Finnish language learning group is about helping immigrants with Finnish learning, but it puts a lot of emphasis on “Finnish culture, traditions and lifestyles”. The teachers mentioned that one good way to learn Finnish is to “learn about Finnish culture”, and the course was organized accordingly. On Vappu (Labor Day), for instance, the teachers brought to class Vappu special snacks and discussed Finnish Vappu traditions. Students learnt topic related vocabulary. The language learning group also often becomes a free space to discuss whatever differences students find interesting. For instance, Abel from Ethiopia has shared his opinions on the “cultural differences” (his phrase) between his culture and Finnish culture. One example he gave was that he would “feel angry and ashamed” if his daughter cohabits with a man before marriage, but he said, “it seems to be very common in Finland”. Culture here refers to local traditions, rhythms, regularities, and different ways of doing things.

The painting group meets every Tuesday from 10 am to 1 pm. I had a feeling of astonishment on my first visit that the art group seemed to belong to its own Finnish world situated in an ethnically diverse neighborhood. It is even a carved-out space in the community center lifting the flag of multiculturalism. Everybody is Finnish, and this contrasts with the living room’s diversity. Although Finnish, Swedish and English are given as the group language, the operating language is solely Finnish. The participants who speak English helped with translating Liisa (the teacher)'s instructions to me, but otherwise they speak Finnish. I could not help wondering how an immigrant with limited Finnish skills would feel in the setting. Liisa is more an organizer than a teacher, as everyone has the freedom to draw whatever they like. Nature is installed as the theme by the joint forces of Liisa’s instructions and everyone’s tendency to pick nature as a subject. The reification of nature took many forms (see figure 7). The same subjects come up repeatedly during the two months: flowers and plants. Markku painted countryside landscapes shaded with trees, a path and a cottage multiple times. He told

me that was a Finnish scene. Once the recommended topic was “kevät” (spring). On a chilly March morning with snow, painting spring was particularly tempting. “You can paint anything! Remember, it is spring, not winter. No winter!” Everyone laughed.

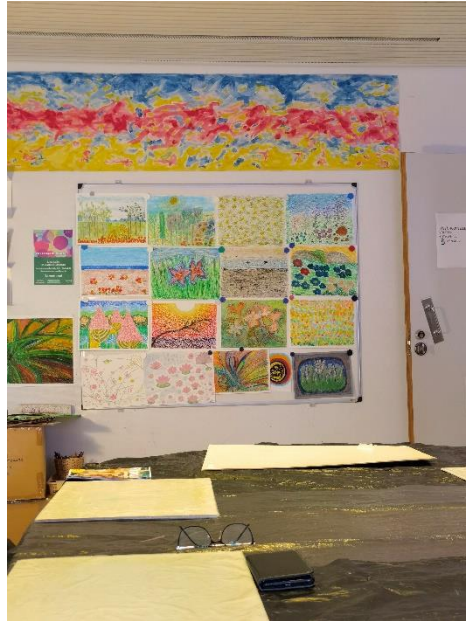


Figure 7. One session’s exhibition. Photo by author.

Spring is painted into flowers, grasses, sea, dots and pieces of colored squares. Some painted abstract images. Elina painted two large sunflowers. She told me this is “mielikuvitus” (imagination). Some present realistically painted images of specific things. It makes so much sense rationally that it resembles a picture. Markku’s style is like this. If you put his paintings together, you immediately discover his realistic style. The group also organized a “paint from life” trip to Helsingin kaupungin talvipuutarha (Helsinki winter garden) in April, where participants seated in the greenhouse for hours and painted directly “from nature” (see figure 8).



Figure 8. One participant's painting from nature in Helsinki winter garden. Photo by author.

Nature as a subject is also addressed in the poetry group's creation. Many art group participants live in areas other than Kontula, and one couple even travel a long way from the city center to engage in this nature depiction as a hobby. The Finnish language groups are free of charge, organized by an NGO, to help immigrants improve their language skills and thus to better integrate in the Finnish society. All the participants are dependent on this program for different reasons: to find a job, to better communicate in everyday life, to gain a license to practice medicine and continue a career as a doctor in Finland... The underlying theme is to survive and to integrate.

It seems that non-citizens do not have time for hobbies: almost no people with migrant backgrounds have time to attend art classes. In this case, immigrants are not engaged in depicting nature.

Experiencing Finnish nature through a socioculturally tinted lens

For many immigrants, nature is processed, digested and evaluated with a socioculturally tinted lens. It means that some immigrants experience Finnish nature differently from Finns for three reasons. Firstly, they grew up elsewhere and compared nature in Finland with their experience in the places where they grew up. Secondly, some immigrants' relation with the concept of nature is different as well. Lastly, when some immigrants

experience Finnish nature, they consider the Finnish sociocultural environment, in terms of how it has shaped their own views of Finnish nature and Finns' relationship with Finnish nature. When asked how they feel about living in Finland, many give a positive answer, and give a lot of weight to the social environment of Finland, precisely, advanced social development and a high quality of life. When I asked Mahti, a ten-year-old boy from Afghanistan how his life is in Finland, he said it is pretty good, because "Everybody has work. There are schools and stores". The conversations took place at the Puotila community garden when Mahti was helping his grandpa with gardening, so I naturally brought up the topic of nature by asking him how he feels about nature here. He said it is nice, because the sea air is fresh. Mahti told me he preferred the Finnish nature over the Afghanistan nature because it is safe and clean here. Mahti made sense of Finland through his experience in Afghanistan, and as a result, it looked different to him than it might to someone raised in Finland. Luc, a man in his sixties from Nice, France, has lived in Finland for twenty years as firstly a bartender and later a construction worker. I met him at Vuosaari beach when he was watching swans. I asked him what his experience is with Finnish nature. Luc expressed his opinions: "Helsinki is one of the best cities in Europe for summer. Because it is clean, peaceful...no pollution. It is clean and tidy. All the Finnish people here are very honest, and nobody ever tries to cheat you." He asked me with great interest as if he was a teacher in class asking a thought-provoking question: "Why is that? Why?" When I was pondering the reasons, Luc revealed the answer: "Education. It is because of education." He also mentioned that it is the Finnish culture to live in peace with animals whenever people see them, to not disturb them. He said that this makes Finnish nature appear more beautiful to him. He slips into the sociocultural arena when thinking of his experience with Finnish nature and views of how Finnish people relate to Finnish nature (animals in this case). Nature is not sculpted out of the residents' surroundings, separated from culture. Understandings of nature are to different extent socioculturally colored. Miju, a PhD student from Bangladesh, told me Helsinki is very special as a capital city because it is a city, but nature is still very much present, which is very different from Bangladesh's capital. "In my city there are only buildings, streets and concrete pavements. If I go out, I only go to the gym. But here everything is fresh. I have had the habit of freely roaming

in nature for half an hour every day.” The same is true for Han from Hong Kong, who owns his own law firm after completing a master's degree in Helsinki.

For someone like me, like an urban resident, I used to have the idea that nature is dirty...you know the mud and bugs, all kinds of things. But now I have gotten used to it and prefer this kind of natural forest now. Like in Hong Kong, there are many green plots, but they are city gardens... so they are artificial.

-Interview with Han, January 2022

Some participants do not like Finnish nature/ environment. Take the sea as an example. It is an essential constituent of Finnish environment and environment in Helsinki. The tranquility and beauty of the sea have been praised by many self-identified Finnish participants. However, it does not always win the hearts of others. Omar expressed his disapproval of the sea in Finland and enthusiastically wanted me to see the differences: “I have seen the sea several times, at Vuosaari and Seurasaari. It was good, but it is very different from my country. My country faces the Atlantic coast, so we swim in the Atlantic. The Atlantic coast is very big. I didn't see any sea waves at Vuosaari. It is small.” He used hand gestures to make the height of the sea waves intelligible to me: “If I stand here, right in front of me there could be a 3-meter ocean wave. It's so nice to swim in that kind of sea...here it is very boring. Our capital Banjul is a small island. With one part facing the Atlantic Ocean, we are in the mouth of Atlantic Ocean. All the small rivers will go to the Atlantic Ocean, and they all look very clean.” Omar again tried to convey the image using body gestures and he gave me an example: “If I stand here now, I can see clearly what is down here. Once I was at Kulosaari and looked down at water from a building. It was not that clean inside. You can see that the color of the water is not bright... In Gambia, you can swim all the time, but here only twice, at Vuosaari and Seurasaari.” In comparing the Finnish sea with the sea at home, Omar pointed obliquely to the fact that the Gulf of Finland, an extension of the Baltic Sea, is one of the most polluted seas in Europe and even in the world. This can be explained by the slow exchange of water, the industrial and agricultural pollution¹¹. The popular representations given by the Finnish authorities have not put a spotlight on this pollution problem when they try to establish the pristine image of the Finnish sea.

¹¹ [Environmental protection in Finland - thisisFINLAND](#)

Nature: inclusion or exclusion?

Meri is a Finnish woman in her fifties. She complained that many immigrants make annoying sounds in forests: “Finnish people would enjoy the sounds of nature, but many Arabic people play very loud music.” I have noticed that myself. On summery Aurinkolahti days, many who “look like immigrants” sit on the beach with a radio playing loud “Arabic” music. The logic of exclusion seems to lurk under the cosmopolitan harmony. Not only are ethnic others seen as not knowing how to enjoy Finnish nature in a correct, Finnish way; ethnic others may not even be seen as used to nature: Meri has a Nigerian god daughter, who “loves playing in nature as much as a Finnish kid does”. Her parents, however, are reluctant when Meri takes their daughter outdoors. Meri explained: “It is understandable, because nature can be dirty and dangerous for them”. It is indeed dangerous, as is observed by Meri, there have been multiple cases of Somalian kids being drowned when swimming in the sea at Rastila. “Somalian parents can leave their kids to swim alone without watching them, and it is dangerous”, she said. But drowning is not rare in Finland¹². It is hard to say whether nature works to include or exclude when diversity and danger is brought into the picture. Nature, however, brings opportunities for bonding. Meri told me she had fished and eaten fish together with two Chinese boys on the beach, and that “brings me to know Chinese people and Chinese culture”. This kind of social exchange can lead to improved mutual understanding across cultural boundaries.

Conclusion

The ways people relate to nature are diverse and patchy. The representation of Finnish nature provided by the Finnish authorities and conceived by many people seems to be a conventional representation that gives rise to a norm of nature, which seems to suggest how representation often works, in terms of generating stereotypes. This representation can exist separately from the complex world where different people are representing, making sense of, and interacting with nature, being or "dwelling" (Ingold 2000) in the

¹² [Drownings in Finland hit 10-year high in 2021 | News | Yle Uutiset](#)

world. It is in this process of reduction, where people's patchy, diverse ways of perceiving and experiencing nature are simplified to one homogenous form presented, advertised, and taken for granted by the Finnish authorities and many people, that nature as a distinctly Finnish way of living, as a culture of nature, becomes a Finnish norm. Different elements and ways of relatedness to nature have been omitted, and a solely Finnish way of living, a form that lacks substance, is left. The norm of nature that emerges from this stereotype is strongly associated with a particular norm of Finnishness: they appear to be mutually dependent norms. In the representation addressing actions of relating to the natural surroundings, a clean, pristine Finnish nature is carved out, which should be unaltered by visitors. Meri also told me she was very unhappy when she saw "Arabic-looking men" grilling near trees, because if there is a fire accident, the trees can be ruined. This pictures an image of danger, which threatened not only the trees and Finnish nature, but was also implicitly a non-Finnish way to behave, based on the idea that no right-minded Finn would light fires that close to a tree. Posing a danger to Finnish nature compromises the good citizenship of "Arabic-looking men". The citizenship here focuses on its cultural dimension. Various claims of ethnic and racial identities are made in everyday engaging in nature, which gives rise to a sort of cultural citizenship that makes fractured, scattered, and partial belonging to Finland. To fully make sense of this cultural dimension of citizenship, it is heuristic to imagine and ask if the trees ever catch fire during grilling accidentally, will it be as destructive as the one in Cape Town that reveals the duality of "aliens and autochthony" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001)? Cultural citizenship also works through the "naturalization" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001) of politics. Ong (1996) discusses the confluence of social, economic and cultural factors in making citizenships. There is one more layer to it: natural citizenship.

Chapter 3 Nature in the "Field": Cultivating Boundaries

“Field” is put in quotes because it refers to an area of open land, planted with crops: the community/allotment gardens. Allotment gardens (siirtolapuutarhat) are a service and attraction offered by the city. It is said to have started to appear in Helsinki in the early 20th century for workers to relax. And nowadays these gardens “offer garden community members a chance to escape the ruckus of the city”¹³. If you visit any allotment garden in the city, it is hard to tell right away whether this is work or recreation. After immersing myself in the allotment gardens for months, I get to make sense of the workings at allotment gardens and appreciate the subtle distinction between work and leisure on the ground, which is important because the distinction is exemplary of fissures and contradictions in representations of Finnish nature.

The chapter discusses the navigation in naturecultures of immigrants and the boundaries between immigrants' practices and that of people who consider themselves Finnish in the community garden. People make and communicate across differences. Based on Kohn's (2013) theory, the chapter argues that representations go beyond language and that is why a homogeneous understanding of the human-nature relatedness in Finland presented in Chapter 2 is problematic and dangerous, for its invention of a citizenship based on “naturalization” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001).

Defining “laborious”

The Puotila community garden (see Figure 9 and Figure 10) is located on the shore, accompanied by a Puotila beach and adjacent to two villas. It belongs to the Puotila neighborhood. According to the garden manager Miki, there are in total 297 gardeners and most of them are Finnish. He estimates there to be between 50-70 gardeners with immigrant backgrounds. The garden, active from April to October, comprised of multiple allotments that can be rented by residents.

¹³ [Helsinki's green oases: 9 allotment gardens | My Helsinki](#)



Figure 9. Puotila community garden. The two chairs add to the recreational atmosphere. Photo by Author.



Figure 10. Puotila community garden. Photo by author.

Heidi is a postdoc researcher, and her husband Esa is a designer. Having had this allotment for a decade, they know exactly what should be done and when they should do it. I witnessed them progressing from preparing the land, planting the seeds and seedlings, to daily management and harvesting. One afternoon in June, I was chatting with Heidi, with both of us sitting. There were some lunch boxes on their table: they just had their lunch. It was a fresh, tranquilizing moment. Heidi said: “This is not my usual allotment moment. It’s possible now because I was here on Friday and yesterday. So now we can... take this enjoyable moment. It’s laborious... I mean even though I would have a friend here and I could be sitting and chatting. You always get the urge to... Like when I see there are few weeds there, you just get the urge to pick them

up while you are talking. So, you always have something to do, so you would always be like sort of doing them.” Heidi described her work as “laborious”, which is true considering its workload and regular weekly investment in the allotment. However, she also takes it eventually a fun thing to do and the joy of the allotment comes from this laboriousness. She read books about allotment gardening. She gives careful thought to gardening approaches, the allotment layout, design and aesthetics.

I guess one of our rules is that we don’t keep grass. The grass area is sort of something we choose rather not have. Because we have concluded that it is too much work. Look opposite us they have this green area. You will think it is very nice to put a blanket here. Then you could put a blanket there, sit there and read a book. But we concluded that we considered the grass a bit burdensome. So, we didn’t have that. We don’t have any grass area here...I mean it is also good if you also have time to enjoy this. But I guess the enjoyment must come primarily from the work you do and from the sort of finding the joy of how things grow and being astonished every year by things like how fast they grow and how beautiful they become. And it is just wonder and sort of things. I guess that must be the main amusement here. I think it starts to look a bit like some sort of culture things. It’s kind of becoming hard work.

-Interview with Heidi, May 2022

When forgoing the conventional grass area because of the laborious work, Heidi invested a little more effort in setting up the flowers. In summer, flowers unevenly distributed in the ocean of green. Some allotments see them in abundance, making a landscape in full bloom; some allotments are dominated by crops with little flowers scarcely scattered. Heidi arranged her flowers thoughtfully on the fringe of the allotment: lavender, buttercup, yellow iris, tulip... “For some reason, many of my flowers are yellow and orange, but I would like to have blue and purple ones.” She got some flowers from her childhood yard; some were given by her mom; some were from her grandma’s garden; some were bought by her that she planted them in a vase in her balcony and brought them here when there was a seedling. “So, you see there are stories, histories behind the flowers. You should come here in summer to see the flowers. They will fully flourish by then. You will also see that every garden has its specialty. Some plant flowers and some plant vegetables.”

What Heidi said was very true. There are gardens that concentrate on flowers and there are those not prioritizing them. As in Figure 10 is an example of the former. Figure

11 shows a common arrangement of flowers on the fringe of the allotment next to the path. There are often people seen taking a walk with their dogs, appreciating the beauty.



Figure 11. A flowers-dominated allotment. Photo by author.



Figure 12. Allotment flowers along the path. Photo by author.

For the Afghan family, flowers are not a priority. Garlic chives are (see figure 13). Nur told me garlic chives are the sole reason they got the allotment, because it is a very important Afghan vegetable, but it cannot be found in Finland. Every year they would use as much space as possible to plant garlic chives. The leaves can be collected multiple times so garlic chives offer a continuous supply for the whole family. The extended family consisting of grandparents, their four children, their spouses and the grandchildren often gather at the allotment in spring and summer. They live in different neighborhoods and the allotment is their meeting point. In winter, Firash, the grandfather comes to the allotment alone every day to check on it, even though the frozen allotment has nothing to be checked on. When asked why he comes here in

winter, Nur, his daughter said he just likes it. Gardening is an important part of the elderly man's life. The family have lived in Finland for twenty years after being displaced by the war in Afghanistan and sent to Finland as refugees. Some family members still hold a Finnish refugee passport ("the green passport" as they describe) and others have already been granted Finnish citizenship.



Figure 13. Garlic chives planted by the Afghan family. Nur specially lifted the white plastic cover to show me. Photo by author.

As can be seen in figure 14, garlic chives have been cultivated in the whole allotment dominantly. "We try to plant them as much as possible. I have already harvested them once yesterday with my mom. We make Bolani with it (see figure 15). We always eat this." Nur told me excitedly.



Figure 14. Garlic chives are absolutely the leading actor in this allotment. Photo by author.

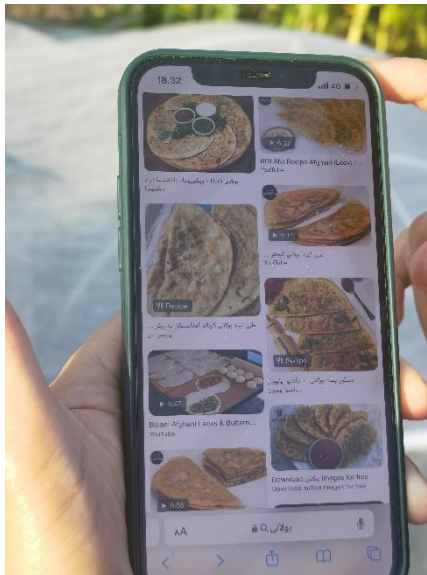


Figure 15. Nur showed me “Garlic chives stuffed Bolani”. Photo by author.

The way the allotment is organized is precisely what Heidi has been puzzling about. Once she brought up her question.

I think particularly some Asian gardeners a bit down there they have a very different kind of allotment. They would have a lot, rows and rows of Zucchini. Like really, it's quite a different approach, also in terms of how many products you get. Because we are already struggling if we have two zucchinis. It's already that much and we struggle to eat them all and we share them with all our friends. Asking like do you want zucchinis? Then seeing someone has fifty zucchinis in their allotments so you start to wonder like...I wonder what they are cooking with it and for how many people. Is it meant for... or are they meant to be served for special occasions or it's... Also like we are sort of like hobby farmers who are happy to get things from here and eat the fresh stuff and enjoy the kind of doing. But not really like that we are gardening for food. We would like to eat...We have this kind of summer food that we serve for the family. It is everything nice from the allotment and it means that it is just a random selection of random stuff that would arrive from the allotment that day. You would boil potatoes and then you would perhaps boil a bit of green beans and put them on garlic, maybe then you will boil eggs. Sometimes we do get the chicken eggs from the garden. Anyway, you would perhaps do something small from spinach then perhaps prepare some small things from zucchini. Then you will have anything from the allotment based on the inspiration of the day.

There are like... I think there are many. I guess like two and three of those kinds of allotments that you would notice if you go around. Last summer I was listening to a Podcast and perhaps towards the end of the summer when everything is overgrown be like very green everything is full. So, you really notice that some people have that secret garden that you already can kind of see that they have wires or something like that, so

you really need to go inside the place to see everything or anything. It seems like a lab. And then others have these like where you have a lot of grasses and just a few spots of things here. And all different approaches. Then there are those zucchini fields then there is the sort of children playground allotment that kind of place. It's nice.

-Interview with Heidi, June 2022

Heidi is self-aware that they are not gardening for food, instead, she is gardening for the pure joy of it, even though it could be laborious. Heidi and Esa are also gardening for a summer collection from the allotment. This stands in contrast with the Afghan family's cultivation for major food and everyday essentials. For many of the participants with immigrant backgrounds, their gardening practices take the form of the allotment cultivation but are close to farming, which are different from gardening because of the subsistence logic. Subsistence is not only a matter of survival. It is defined by scarcity. Garlic chives are not available in Finland. Nur and her family turn the scarcity into abundance with consistent labors and the everyday presence in the field. After showing me garlic chives, Nur yelled to her mom in Persian saying that there are also garlic chives in China. Her mom, with whom I was unable to communicate with because of the language barrier, happily nodded and smiled. I understood her without knowing her language. This communication process is a bonding process. Nur added: "I know you have this in China. And Chinese people make dumplings with it". I told her she was right that we do have those in China, and I personally like it. We also make a type of food like their "Bolani". When Nur and I were standing in the garden, her sister Asal called. Garlic chives are apparently a big deal for her as well. When I asked her if she also came to the allotment:

Asal: Yes, I also come here. I come only occasionally because it is too far away. I live in Kannelmäki. It's too difficult to get there. I must take a train, then the Metro. But during the summer I come to help.

Xiaolin: What do you help with?

Asal: Sometimes I help my father in the garden. In the summer months, me and my sister were here, working in the garden. Sometimes we pick up the vegetables. All my summer went like that. We clean, we pick the vegetables. I help my parents here in summer because my father doesn't speak Finnish, neither English. So, for him, it is difficult. Because some neighbors come to ask him something about the garden, and stuff like that. So, need me and my sister to help.

Xiaolin: What do neighbors ask about?

Asal: Something like what do you have in your garden. Because in Asia, we have very different vegetables. They don't know here. "It's in my country. It is only in my country. (Asal was talking about garlic chives, but she didn't use the English term, so I misunderstood her and thought she was talking about the use of the white plastic cover. She corrected me. She was talking about garlic chives, this "vegetable". Nur also at the time told Asal we have this in China as well.)

Asal. Yes. I have seen in a YouTube video the Chinese did some dumple...dumple...veges and meat something like that and they boil it in the water."

Xiaolin: Dumplings?

Asal: "Ah, dumplings yes!"

Xiaolin: Before you moved to Finland, did you do this kind of farming or gardening work in Afghanistan?

Asal: We grew up here in Finland. My other sisters grew up in other countries. It is so difficult to say. But I think it is thing over there. Our people do some gardening like that...

-Interview with Asal, Aug. 2022

Garlic chives are food, rather than a summer allotment selection. They exceed the food category to be a medium through which Afghanistan (country of origin), despite its vision sharpness being different for different members of the family, is remembered and revisited, through which Asia is pictured and a bond is formed. Garlic chives for the Afghan research participants are like spinach and zucchini for the two Bangladeshi families. There is a lot of spinach and zucchini in Miju's allotment. He introduced me to the red spinach: "This thing, this red spinach is not from Finland. You cannot find this in Finland, even the seeds have come from my country. I bought it, so this is completely new. This one they call Malabar spinach. This is another kind of spinach. It's difficult to get, to see it here in Finland." For another Bangladeshi family at Puotila, the red spinach also takes over a large space of their allotment. One couple from Nepal at the Puotila community garden have upgraded this "planting for food" to the next level. It was an impressive moment when I first saw Hema, a middle-aged lady, walk barefoot in the field, occupied with weeding. This scene is resonant with the image of farmers working in paddy fields, which is popularly practiced in Nepal. This must be a different way of relating to the field, compared with that of Heidi and her husband. They always change to rainboots in the allotment unless it is a quick visit. Heidi said she could never imagine herself walking barefoot here. Hema and her husband have had the allotment for ten years and they come here twice a week. She is a nurse, and her husband is "a businessman", owning a Nepalese restaurant. Part of their harvest ends

up on the family's plates and the rest goes to the restaurant. This is unusual in a city where most restaurants purchase products from suppliers. Their work is employed to produce useful goods and services, distinct from the unproductivity of "the leisure class" (Veblen 1899). This is a serious work-themed labor. "Work" is used by all the participants to describe their engagement in the allotment, for some it is more of a leisure activity, and for others it is more like labor, although there are undeniably sufficient elements of fun. It is not the demanded labor input, but the purposeful nature of labor that differentiates labor from leisure. I by no means indicate that work and labor is a duality or Finnish people garden for leisure and immigrants practice gardening as work. Nonetheless, it is true that based on the observations at Puotila, this contrast is sensible. This echoes the interpretation by Parreñas (2018) of the work of care at an orangutan rehabilitation center in Sarawak: the dangerous, hard labor in the Global South becomes a consumable commodity of leisure for the Global North.

Cultivating the community

The section above implies that people are both experiencing and creating differences in the way that they garden in the allotments, ones that extend beyond the garden and through to the differences that they feel they have in a much wider sense - both cultural and locational. This section shows how allotments can bring people with different backgrounds closer and enable communication between differences.

Miju took me around the allotments, introducing the characteristics of each allotment and stories of their owner. He warmly greeted everyone: one Bangladesh friend, one elderly Finnish lady and one Finnish man. He knows all his neighbors in the community garden well, which is a remarkable achievement considering how many neighbors are there. He takes the initiative and makes deliberate efforts. It is his daily routine to go on a tour of inspection to discover and learn about new plants, through which he knows the people behind them. I asked him: "You have been here for only two months, and you got acquainted with everyone?" Miju said: "The thing is like here, it's not only you come for the farming you need to spend your time...your leisure time, so this is kind of a good thing. You see something then you ask them what this is. If you see something new... Earlier maybe...I can show you there's some good, very beautiful

flowers. Those flowers attract me a lot.” He guided me to an allotment where varieties of flowers are nicely placed on the boundary. Miju spoke energetically, with a bright smile on this face: “This one! They are not in good shape right now. Those orange ones are. They are beautiful.” It was lilies that he was fascinated with. “Aren’t these lilies?” “Yes, but I didn’t know that at all. When I saw them at first like wow, so I started talking with the Finnish lady who usually does the farming there and she told me I must come just after winter then they start giving the seedlings you can grow them, and they will by the summer they will be beautiful. Maybe I have seen them in supermarkets, but I have never got attracted in that way. It’s so pretty.” Miju and an elderly Finnish man and his next-door allotment neighbor became good friends via gardening. The man dwells on Finnish herbs. Miju picked one herb that grows sloppily like a weed and invited me to bite: the elderly Finnish man introduced this to him. Different vegetables circulate in the garden by exchange. Miju remarked: “I think that’s the meaning of this... they call it community garden. This is the main meaning of this thing. Sharing, sharing your knowledge, building your new community, not a bad thing here, especially for a foreigner.”

One way of understanding Miju’s approach is to say that it is about communicating across differences. It is about moving across boundaries: the ethnic boundary, language boundary, cultural boundary, natural product boundary, knowledge boundary, boundaries between self and others, and so on. The language barrier, for example, is real for Nur and Asal’s elderly parents, but they are negotiable. Firstly, it is undermined by translation. Mahti, the grandson, is a helpful translator. He speaks English and Finnish fluently. When I first met the family on April 30th at the “talkoot” (communal work) event, Mahti was busy with helping his grandpa clearing the remains and preparing the land and being a translator for his grandpa (see figure 16). When I initiated a conversation with the grandpa, he just smiled, waved his hand, and pointed to his lips friendly and apologetically. He tried to convey that he is incapable of verbal communication. He sought help from Mahti and the boy immediately took over the conversation. Mahti answered my questions if he could and turned to his grandpa when he couldn’t. Talkoot is a Finnish traditional communal work during which people gather, offer labor help to others towards achieving the same goal. On this Puotila

community garden talkoot day, many people are preparing the land at the same time by removing waste and placing compost. The talkoot seemed to be about “working at the same time” instead of “working together and helping each other”. Gardeners turned out to work relatively independently and only occasionally interact for help. Mahti and grandpa have a red garden cart in use to transport the old leaves and branches to the trash car. When a Finnish man came to talk to grandpa in Finnish to borrow the cart, he was completely lost and immediately called Mahti’s name for help. After speaking with Mahti in Finnish, the man left with their cart. In a while, the grandpa spoke to Mahti. Mahti immediately left to borrow a shovel from one Finnish neighbor working in the allotment. This happens rather frequently. The grandpa also needed to go together with Mahti to get the cart back, which had not been returned for a while. Mahti was his grandpa’s indispensable assistant, who not only worked closely with his grandpa in terms of substantial labor, but also more importantly provided a helping hand to overcome the language barrier. He is the communication bond between his grandpa and the grandpa’s surroundings. The separation built on language works in parallel and concomitantly with the impediment to mutual understanding. Mutual understanding is often cultivated in the community garden, which is about understanding oneself and others (e.g., Heidi’s wondering about some Asian cultivators’ different approaches to gardening). This understanding is cultivated just as diverse plants are cultivated in the plots, be it typically Finnish, Asian specific, familiar, strange or anything else. Wondering about an allotment arrangement or gardening method that is slightly strange and distinctly different from a “Finnish” one or asserting that a plant is exclusively Asian are both walking down the path of the mutual understanding. Communications are not monopolized by language or other forms of symbols. It can also simply be achieved by wondering, guessing, self-assuring, questioning, and explaining. It can happen without any form of visible social interaction: for example, Heidi and her husband deem immigrants’ cultivation approaches to be radically different from theirs. The Afghanistan family’s garlic chives, and the Bangladesh families’ spinach and zucchini all facilitate making differences, negotiating, and communicating across differences. Heidi assumed the different gardening habits were related to the fact that these people were not born in Finland. She could have assumed it

was something to do with the individual personalities of those particular gardeners, and nothing at all to do with Asian. The distinction between Finnish and not Finnish is being made in the process at the same time.



Figure 16. Mahti and grandpa. Photo by author.

Conclusion

The meaning of the boundaries changes when people communicate. The differences do not disappear; it is more that people are less afraid of those differences. The communication is not dependent on language. What happens at the allotments is that making, communicating across differences, being self and relating to others and the environment take many forms. According to Kohn's (2013) theory of representation, these processes can be understood as representations. He reconceptualizes representation as a basic way of being in the world, which non-human beings like trees are also capable of. Garlic chives could be understood as a sign, an index: they prompt communications across boundaries. People make and communicate across differences in the field. Immigrants' cultivations of them, their growth are themselves a sign, a part of representations and being in the world, existing and dwelling. By thinking of the use of "index" in representation, this representation always extends beyond language (Kohn 2013). These representations as being in the world contrast with the conventional

representation based on language analyzed in Chapter 2. The contrast further suggests the problematic nature of the representation of nature as a distinctly Finnish way of living discussed in Chapter 2. For example, people's relationship with nature does not always seem to be about fun: it could also be laborious work, especially for some immigrants. "Fun" and "work" appear to take different gardening approaches, as was noted by Heidi. The distinction between Finnish and not Finnish is being made when Heidi assumed the different gardening habits were related to the fact that these people with immigrant backgrounds were not born in Finland.

Chapter 4 Racism, Speciesism and the Alternatives

The drama of hares experienced by Omar described in the introduction chapter is situated in the multispecies encounters unfolding in the fleeting moments. The dynamics of relations are the central concern. More-than-human sociality (Tsing 2013) constitutes an important part of residents' perceptions and experiences of Finnish nature. It is important to concentrate on the nonhuman species appearing on the front stage and backstage, as they inspire understanding of immigrants' social positionings and their active refashioning and negotiations of them, not only as an object to think with (Levi-Strauss 1963) , but also as an actor in shaping the more-than-human engagements. One more important question to ask about Omar's experience is the essence of the conflict (Omar's wife warned him against catching hares to eat), that is to say, what generates the conflict and what makes it possible, and what sustains it to appear repeatedly. Some analysis is needed when the conflict is a pattern. Meri told me she had heard so many stories about "African people here want to catch animals for food when they see them". So, is there anything wrong with it? It is probably wrong when animals are hunted without a Finnish hunting license issued by the Finnish wildlife agency¹⁴, and it is equally problematic when animals like hares become food while people who do not hunt deem them as cute beings that do not fall into the category of food.

¹⁴ [Suomen riistakeskus – Finlands viltcentral](#)

This chapter aims to find answers to questions of the conflict. It describes and analyzes some cases of multispecies “becoming with” (Haraway 2008) in the field and they are divided into two sections: “Exploitation” and “Reciprocity and Mutualism”, with an emphasis on the former. The logic behind the division is Hage’s (2017) theory of “generalized domestication” in arguing for the common foundation of racism and environmental crisis. While following his theoretical path, I am proposing a slightly different approach to understanding exploitation and racism that is in the same spirit with Hage’s, which is based on the experiences in the field and a critical application of his theories with a few minor adjustments. Exploitation essentially concerns extracting values for the use of one side’s of the relationship, built on a polarization of differences between self and others as two categories. However, boundary-makings are more than the distinction between self and others. Looking in depth, boundary-makings are about categorizations of countless forms that serve norms and standards. When looking for solutions to racism and speciesism, this chapter will show that different from Hage’s (2017) single solution to promote the “reciprocal” and “mutualist” modes of existence to counteract “generalized domestication”, racism and speciesism can also be counteracted by boundary-crossings that break the conventional regimes of values and governmentality. These regimes standardize differences. Afterall, some stories will show that sometimes, generalized domestication can be counter-racism and counter-exploitation. Exploitation is a complicated process in motion. Besides recognizing the exploiters and the exploited, it is important to recognize that exploitation is an environment where everyone can be a victim.

Exploitation

Hage (2017) argues that both racism and environmental crisis are exploitation in nature that is built on the generative mechanism of “generalized domestication”. “Generalized domestication” is “a mode of inhabiting the world through dominating it for the purpose of making it yield value: material or symbolic forms of sustenance, comfort, aesthetic pleasure, and so on” (Hage 2017, chap 3). The domestication of animals and racial others both work through three processes: spatial occupation, polarization of difference and extraction to yield value. It is based on “an instrumentalist mode of classification

that is reducible to questions of usage and harm” (Hage 2017, chap 3). Useless, harmful animals and racial others from the perspective of the domesticators are subject to exterminatory tendencies. According to him, weed, pest and Muslims are all examples of entities that have not yet been domesticated and are therefore a threat.

From affection to alienness

The stories about exploitation begin with city bunnies/ rabbits (Kani in Finnish). City bunnies, European hares and mountain hares are three species found in Finland and they all belong to the Leporidae family comprising of rabbits and hares according to the species taxonomy. Leporidae means "those that resemble Lepus (hare)"¹⁵. City bunnies and European hare (rusakko in Finnish) make an intriguing contrast in terms of spatial distribution and their scientifically and socio-politically defined places in nature. In Finland, city bunnies are an invasive alien species¹⁶, and hares are invasive but not alien. Bunnies are mentioned by the participants along with hares, and they and hares constitute a conceptual scale to reflect on. While hares are most abundant in East Helsinki, bunnies have made the city center their home. Some participants who are self-identified Finnish told me city bunnies are mainly found around Helsinki city center. The name is self-explanatory that they belong to cities, instead of the city peripheral areas like East Helsinki, as was suggested by Juhani, who once mentioned that some of his friends do not live in East Helsinki, and they live in “real Helsinki”. I asked why those neighborhoods are the real Helsinki, he told me: “There are no forests between city center and their neighborhoods”, “and of course no rusakko (hares)”, he added. This is a super interesting statement that deserves analysis, for its strong implications of location making. It is true that initially bunnies are most densely distributed in the parks and gardens around central Helsinki in the mid-1980s, then they began to spread at the turn of the millennium to other parts of Helsinki (Lehtiniemi, Nummi, and Leppäkoski 2016). It is noted that in the past five years, city bunnies have moved eastward to areas like Herttoniemi and Vuosaari, in eastern Helsinki¹⁷. The city of

¹⁵ [Leporidae - Wikipedia](#)

¹⁶ [European Rabbit – Invasive Alien Species Portal \(vieraslajit.fi\)](#)

¹⁷ [Baby boom for Helsinki's city bunnies | News | Yle Uutiset](#)

Helsinki has organized vigorous bunny hunts since 2008, in the peak years 2000-4000 bunnies were caught (Lehtiniemi, Nummi, and Leppäkoski 2016). The crisis never ceases despite the mass hunt that lasted for years, and the City of Helsinki today is still dealing with the “bunny swarm”¹⁸.

Bunnies are said to cause damage to parks, gardens and buildings, particularly to plants in parks. While European hares are equally capable of damage, they are not invasive alien species in Finland. Hares are common visitors to the allotment gardens, and they are different existences for different people. Miju told me he saw “rusakko” in the allotments all the time and he never saw them as annoying troublemakers. Heidi and her husband, however, take serious preventive measures against possible hare damage in their allotment. They put up fences around their berries and use plastic covers for their salad vegetables: “They are for rabbits mostly. They are salads. They would like to eat them. The covers are to keep it warm because it might be cold during the nights. But now it is for rabbits”. They have one additional strategy that I find particularly creative: they arrange their vegetables in a way that a natural barrier is formed to stop hares. Garlic and onions are planted on the outer edge to surround other crops as a fence. Heidi said hares do not eat garlic, that’s why she makes this kind of a “biological fence”. The thing is that even though hares do practically cause damage to the allotments, and they are indeed taken as invaders to be dealt with, there is a limit to how serious the control gets. They are certainly not thinned in the same way as weeds and Spanish snails as an invasive species in allotments (discussions come next). Neither are hares hunted and exterminated as city bunnies. “Rusakko” are hunted in another sense. In 2013, for example, approximately 66,100 European hares were hunted for recreation and food in Finland¹⁹. Nonetheless, none of the 66100 hares were hunted for the purpose of species control, as is the case for city bunnies. A hare and a bunny die differently, for different causes, which, it could be argued, is the necropolitics (Mbembe 2019) at work. The domination, instrumentalism, exploitation and power underlying inter-human relationships are more easily expressed in human-animal relationships (Hage 2017, chap 1). Defining some species as invasive and execute state-sponsored

¹⁸ [Helsinki grapples with bunny swarm | TheMayor.EU](#)

¹⁹ [Rusakko – Wikipedia](#)

organized killing is based on a polarity of autochthony and alienness and it constantly reproduces this polarization. Different countries have their own invasive species lists, and the European Union has a list of “Invasive Alien Species of Union concern” dictating that “member States are required to take action on pathways of unintentional introduction, to take measures for the early detection and rapid eradication of these species, and to manage species that are already widely spread in their territory²⁰[66]. The intended consolidation of sovereignty addresses species as well as immigrants.

In Finland, invasive alien species is “a species that has spread to a new area with human intervention”²¹. Petri Nummi is a senior lecturer at the department of forest sciences at the University of Helsinki. He specializes in invasive species and has participated in making the invasive species list (Finland). He explained that the key to invasive alien species is “alien”. It means for instance a species is “brought by human over a distribution barrier to a new biogeographical area”. I raised my confusion over the status of European hares because their spread to Finland was promoted by games in the early 1900s, just following the European hares “natural” spreading to Finland (Nummi 1988). If this is not human intervention, what can be counted as human intervention? Nummi explained that the European hares are invasive species (tulokaslaji) in Finland, but they are not alien species (vieraslaji) because “it has spread here by its own means, as a natural range expansion”. But the question is, why can European hares be considered as indigenous, despite being invasive, while the bunnies cannot? European hares in Finland are said to be influencing mountain hares’ population in Finland, and that is what makes it invasive. As was pointed out by Nummi, the concern is “alienness/ non-naiveness”, rather than “invasiveness”. Invasiveness is defined by alienness. Invasive species and alien species seem to be interchangeably used. The paradox of the European hares is very conspicuous that the species is indigenous and alien at the same time. But how alien is alien? What is the scale? It reaches beyond the concerns of temporality. The ambiguity of the hares’ status seems to echo the ambiguity of Roma people’s status in Finland. Although Roma people have lived in Finland for over five centuries, they are still marginalized and

²⁰ [List of Invasive Alien Species of Union concern - Environment - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

²¹ [Invasive Alien Species Portal \(vieraslajit.fi\)](#)

underprivileged in the Finnish society, and targets of discrimination and racism (Granqvist 2020). Olivia's family has lived in Finland forever and she considers herself as a "Finnish Gypsy". She told me: "It is so difficult to talk to Finnish people. I don't know why." Her self-distancing from the Finnish identity conveys the self-awareness of her core ethnic identity and reflects how ethnic others can adopt and accept the alien positions constructed and imposed by the state.

City bunnies are "descendants of former pets that were let loose - or escaped from their owners - in the 1980s and 90s"²². The duality of domestication and wildness underlies the radical transformation of bunny's status from pets to killable vermin. The "spatial occupation" of bunnies and humans crash into each other. The recognition of cuteness of bunnies as humans hold onto the feelings and affects is addressed by the state and scientists as well (Lehtiniemi, Nummi, and Leppäkoski 2016, 55). Science is often understood as a product of the object-subject duality and its many counterparts (e.g., Ingold 2000). In fact, it often involves intersubjective engagement, even though the engagement sometimes is realized by detachment rather than entanglement (Candea 2010). Bunnies are cute, but they still need to be dealt with. Detachment in this case makes space for biopolitical governmentality to function based on a scientific recalibration of species. Nummi is a music lover, and his music has been inspired by beavers. American beavers as an invasive alien species are believed to have threatened the indigenous Eurasian beavers in Finland (Liukko et al., 2016). While Nummi study American beavers as an alien species, he says he does not make distinction between the two species of beavers when making music. The distinction simply does not occur. His song praises beavers' intelligence as a master engineer: "Beaver, beaver, beaver...if you hear something in the night, it might be a beaver building his dam"²³. The scene of a beaver busy with home-building and the cheerful melody conveys that an American beaver does not always have to be an American beaver. It can just be a beaver, or at least an engineer. The beaver can live in this piece of song eternally, avoiding the massive hunt. But maybe this nondifferentiation upholds a separation between "the two worlds of humanity and nature" (Ingold 2000, 1).

²² [Baby boom for Helsinki's city bunnies | News | Yle Uutiset](#)

²³ <https://www.facebook.com/inthefieldbiology/posts/332976361513511>

Bunnies test the state's tolerance of boundary breakers by escaping, being released, staying, living, thriving, dying, and by entering and dwelling in the spaces they should not, and by messing up the neat spatial and conceptual boundaries. An interesting story about traveling bunnies is told in the book "Jättiputkesta citykaniin: Vieraslajit Suomessa (From Hogweed to City Bunnies: Invasive Alien Species in Finland)". Before Christmas, a city bunny is reported to have climbed into the engine compartment of a car to warm up and traveled about 700 kilometers from 9 am to 5 pm from Helsinki to Hyrynsalmi (Lehtiniemi, Nummi, and Leppäkoski 2016, 56). The bunny has in this way further extended its habitat, despite its unintentionality.

Weeding

Weeding is a common practice found inside and outside of the allotments. Weeds are the biggest problem in Puotila allotments and weeding is the most time-consuming obligation for every gardener I have talked with. It is an everyday routine, without which most gardeners could not proceed with cultivating. Gardeners invest a lot of time in removing weeds, because they regrow unceasingly. This section shows that subjects for weeding extend beyond plants to include all the undesirable in gardening. Weeding is a figurative encapsulation of exploitation based on a constant localization of a subject on the harmful and useful axis.

On a sunny day in May, Heidi has pulled weeds for more than thirty minutes. She pulled the weeds into a basket (see figure 17). When one part is finished, she moves forward to continue. I also moved in the same direction to keep up with her. She told me these are "rikkaruoho", meaning unwanted grass. When she pulled the weeds, the soil was turned, and all kinds of worms emerged. Heidi hand-picked the snails and put them into another basket. She told me these are Finnish snails: "There are two types of snails. One is Finnish and the other is Spanish. They do not have the shell. The Finnish snails are alright, but the Spanish ones (Spanish slug) are really what we need to fight with. They are invasive species. The main problem in the garden is snails, and the ones ladybugs eat". Heidi is tilling the soil meanwhile. There is a huge population of snails spreading everywhere. Heidi found an earthworm. She showed it to me and cast it back, and it didn't take long before the earthworm went back into the soil. "Naakka eats this.

Sometimes they just wait here for those”, she explained. Naakka is the Eurasian jackdaw (see figure 18). I have seen the bird multiple times in Heidi’s allotment. The jackdaw usually walks with ease to search for food, with great composure. The bird carries itself as if this is its territory. Food comes easily by cooperation with humans. Heidi commented worms indicate that the soil is healthy, and some worms can help with tilling. Therefore, she doesn’t mind the worms, but snails are a different story:

They eat crops, so they have a bad influence on the harvest. Snails can give birth to hundreds...Sometimes it rains, the ground is full of snails, it is a little disgusting to step on, and the experience is not good. They have a fast reproduction rate, so it needs to be controlled. But they won't go extinct. They're not going to go extinct.

-Interview with Heidi, May 15, 2022

Heidi controls snails mostly by using iron. I watched her sprinkling many blue iron particles all over the soil. She says it's environmentally friendly because it doesn't affect other animals, crops or people. “It works by dehydrating snails”, she explained and picked up some empty shells to show me. The fragile shells have a white, calcified look. I picked up one live snail and could already see the bluish iron slowly invading the tiny body. This is an efficient method. Heidi explained to me her way of dealing with snails:

I used to collect these snails, not medicine. It wasn't a pretty story...what I do with them. I drowned them with water and vinegar. I don't feel good about it myself, but sometimes you must do something like this.

-Interview with Heidi, May 15, 2022

Heidi did not take comfort in killing the snails; she has told that she knows that she lives in a relationship with many species in the garden and she was honest about her moral reaction to their suffering. The objectification conflicts with a subject-formatting process. She reacted but did not respond to the pain of snails, and it is in this lack of moral response that snails' status as animals is reconfirmed, without risking Heidi’s humanity. The difference between killing and making beings killable is at stake (Haraway 2008, 80), and it gives rise to this fleeting self-reflection that remains unresolved. That is exactly what happened when Heidi and Esa spotted a group of mice in the corner of the allotment. The mice were hairless, blind new-born. Esa told me he

was about to kill them, but “naakka” finished them within seconds. “Nature seems to be beautiful, but it is not 100%. Some scenes like watching mice being swallowed are horrible to watch”, Heidi talked about the complicatedness of nature. I asked her what she would have done if the jackdaw had not come. She said she would take them to forests so that birds or something could eat them. It seems better to leave the critters' fate in the hands of other beings to achieve the killing goal. They tell me there is often the same bird sitting and singing in the tree next to their allotment. “If you see it often, you think it is the same bird”, Heidi and Esa know the bird and the jackdaw as charismatic animal persons, while they kill snails as a species. It is enough when she knows that they are not threatening the Finnish snails with extinction. Afterall, snails as a species rather than a snail individual can be granted a quasi-personhood (Carrithers, Bracken, and Emery 2011).

I picked up a few live snails from the allotment when Heidi was scattering around iron (see figure 19). Heidi asked me what I was planning to do with the snails. “Maybe pets!” I answered. When I saw her the next time, the first thing she asked was where those snails ended up: she was apparently seriously concerned. I told her I just put them on the lawn next to the forest. She was not unhappy, but it was not the right ending for her: “Well... it is fine but if they were Spanish snails, they really shouldn't be just released.” Capacity to cause damage and the ability to reproduce fast render snails exterminable. This is an exemplification of “numerical speciesism”, pointing to what Hage (2017, chap 3) has called “numerical racism”. The increase in the number of “others” moves them speedily from the “harmless and useful” category toward the “harmful and useless” category, and the result is to activate the exterminatory tendency in “us”, the domesticators. The numerical logic is underpinned by an essential logic, meaning that “one harmful and useless other” is sufficient to incur extermination. Maybe that is why my setting a few snails free caused tension, because that is a deviance from the norm, from how things go routinely, and from being responsible.



Figure 17 Weeds. Photo by author.



Figure 18 Patrolling jackdaw. Photo by author.



Figure 19 Snails that “slip through the net”. Photo by author.

The City of Helsinki has strict instructions on the management of the allotments, and cultivators are expected to stick to the rules²⁴. Weeds must be removed before they flower. There is also “Instructions on combating harmful invasive alien species” to “encourage the City’s residents to stop growing harmful invasive species” and to “inspire

²⁴ [*Palstaohje A5 EN netti.pdf \(hel.fi\)](#)

cultivators to help the city get rid of harmful invasive alien species”²⁵. The conceptualization of weeds and invasive alien species is sustained and strengthened by the everyday practice of ordinary people inside the logic of establishing norms and standardizations for cultivation. An allotment must be properly maintained. Neglect will send the allotment into abandonment with a sense of wildness, and the city has the right to take it back after reminders. When Miju took me on an allotment tour, he showed me how one neighbor cultivated only a small patch of the whole allotment and left the rest overrun with weeds. We couldn’t stop laughing at it. As can be seen in figure 20, it is an extremely funny twist and a humorous deflection of the regulations: by doing this, he avoids losing the allotment. Is it obedience or resistance? Meri, in contrast, didn’t have much luck. She lost her “right” to cultivate her friends’ allotment after “sloppily” planting the flower seeds without removing the weeds. The ungovernable weeds lead to a partnership breakdown and lay the right ways to do the right things open.

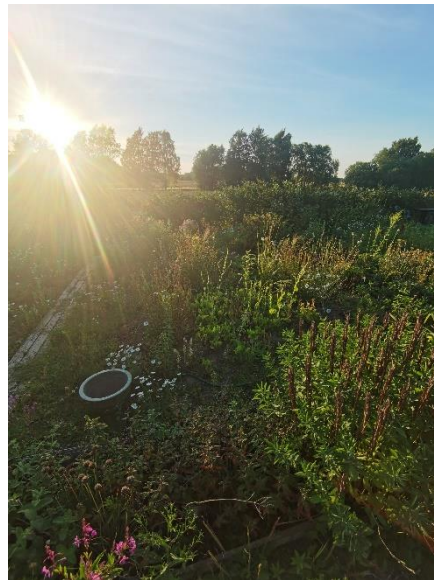


Figure 20. Plants surrounded by weeds. Photo by author.

It is worth noting that weed management also happens outside the allotment (see figure 21). I have participated in one where many neighbors joined, including self-identified Finnish people and someone from Poland. During the weeding, people got to

²⁵ [Vieraslajiohjeet_A5_EN_netiti.pdf \(hel.fi\)](#)

know each other and spent some fun time together: social relations are also cultivated, and a small social group is formed! Weeding does not only concern controlling nature, but it is also a matter of collective responsibility, no matter who you are and where you are from! Do your own part otherwise others will suffer. People can also do it cooperatively.



Figure 21 Weeding and planting flowers next to a street in Myllypuro. Photo by author.

“I am my own person”

I met Omar when we collected residence permit cards from R-kioski. I asked him whether he would be interested in joining my research. He accepted my invitation and said he would call me. I got the call in the evening, and he suggested meeting at 7 pm. Later I got his message saying he could not make it because something came up and asked me would it be fine to change it to 7:45 pm. I waited for him in front of the neighborhood church, and at 7:50 pm he finally showed up. Right from the start, agreeing on the meeting place for the interview was marked with an unusual sense of secretiveness. I initially suggested doing the interview at the table next to my home building and thought we could meet at the gate of the school next to it. Hearing this, he immediately turned me down over the phone, saying that he lives nearby, and he doesn't want to appear conspicuous; he made it clear that he wanted to go somewhere with good privacy. Again, I didn't give it considerable thought, albeit being slightly confused. Then I suggested to meet in the church yard, and he happily accepted it: “yes that is a good place!”.

We took seats in the church backyard next to which the forests stand, surrounding us with refreshing green, and Omar filled up the silence by explaining to me what the hassle was all about. The simple answer is his wife. It is impossible to step into such an intimate life world without him ushering me in the direction. He didn't permit me to record the interview but said I could make notes and use the materials, because "in the end, I am my own person" and he has nothing to hide. Omar says: "I have a Finnish wife", so he needs to pay attention to behave himself, to avoid unnecessary troubles. "People can misunderstand it when they see it," he said. "It is purely research," I was surprised and replied. "Yes, true. But my wife wouldn't see it this way," Omar said. Omar is in his early thirties and his wife is seventeen years older than him. They met in Gambia. He now holds a residence permit based on family ties after getting married with his wife in Gambia. He said he should be able to get a permanent residence permit in four years and ultimately the Finnish passport if he won't be "involved in any crimes". Omar told me he came to Finland "in the front-way", which mean he is legally staying in Finland. "You don't go in the front-way then you go from backway," said he, "I know some people come here from Libya. They first go to Italy. Some have a wife, and some without a wife or anything. They are figuring out how to stay here."

Omar has a Finnish wife, so in the sense of "frontway" or "backway", he has an advantage. However, he is under constant surveillance in marriage. During the interview, he received two calls from his wife. The phone can be surveillance technology (Hannaford 2015; Wallis 2011). He answered in English mixed with Finnish. "I will be back soon," Omar tried to ease his wife's anxiety. He explained his situation:

I am a black guy. I have heard a lot of Gambia man, many of them have come here then disappointed their Finnish wife. My wife is a bit anxious. But in the end, I am a man. I make my decisions. I am my own person.

-Interview with Omar, June 2022

Omar told me I put him on his guard when I asked him to join the interview, because "it happened many times with Finnish girls as they want to get my phone number and have sex."

Xiaolin: Does your wife know this?

Omar: Yes. She knows her country's people. Nobody is perfect. Even if you love your partner, you could fall into someone outside. It is human nature.

Xiaolin: Okay.

Omar: But I have always been good to my wife.

-Interview with Omar, June 2022

Omar has been with his wife for five years and asserted he has always been very loyal to his wife.

Omar: My wife loves me very much and I respect her and love her. I will want to take good care of her, love her, respect her. And I want to be honest with her." " Even though I may like, may appreciate some woman in my heart.

Xiaolin: Well, as long as you won't act on those feelings...

Omar: You never know. In some cases, that might happen.

Xiaolin: Under what circumstances?

Omar: Like alcohol influences very bad. You don't know what you will do after drinking. But I don't like alcohol.

Xiaolin: When do you drink?

Omar: When there are troubles or fights in the relationship. Relationship is very deep. It is too deep. Smoking and drinking help me to cool down. I am a very sensitive person. I just go out because she loves me 100 percent. And I respect her a lot. I don't want any issues. It is Gambia moral. I shouldn't disappoint my wife. We shouldn't betray each other. If the relationship ends, it should end in a good way, not cheating.

-Interview with Omar, June 2022

Omar said his wife will be very painful if she finds out he is cheating, so that if he won't let his wife find out if he someday will cheat on her, because that is the right way to respect her. That's why, he explained, there is no need to let his wife know about his going out to see me to avoid troubles. He declared it is a Gambia culture and mentality to be honest.

Omar: I will be honest with you. I am honest. Everyone says they are honest. But honesty is very difficult to find. I have had many chances to have fun with other women and sometimes I almost did it, but my conscience tells me no. I use sense not my mind. Following your feelings too much may not be good for you. I don't believe in the word honesty. If you don't cheat on your wife, you may be dishonest in other situations. When you talked to me at R-kiosk, I was like okay I don't know what she wants, but don't just reject her, who knows, maybe she is someone God sent to my life. I know that kind of people. They just want to have fun with you then throw you away. You don't want to feel rejected. I don't want to be used. I always want what I want. Anyways I have a Finnish wife. I am married. I have my life here. Everything is fine. But I have a life away from her...She is a responsible person, and very positive. She dislikes many things in the world. Her life is simple: job, home. She never goes to parties, and she is easily worried. But you

can't stop me doing what I want to do. In my country, trust is the foundation of every relationship. Nothing works without trust. I have told my wife that if anything will go wrong in the marriage, it is her fault. She made me do that.

Xiaolin: Because your wife monitors you?

Omar: Yes yes, too tight without any space. I can be watched because I know it is because my wife loves me, and I am responsible for her. I want to love and respect my wife. But it could be the opposite if it is like this for too long. It is better to have some distance. I am okay, but too much isn't good. Even if someday, I will cheat on her, I will still respect her and not let her know. You can never tell what will happen tomorrow. Even if you do it, you hide it and do not let them know. Even if I do something wrong, I won't let her notice. I will hide it in the dark.

-Interview with Omar, June 2022

He repeated many times: “Afterall, I am a man. I make my own decisions. I am my own person.” Omar found himself in a dilemma. On the one hand, he continuously expressed his wish to be faithful, to obey, and to subject himself to being disciplined and self-disciplined. On the other hand, he persistently resists discipline and emphasizes free will. As a man from Africa, he was assumed to be capable of acting in a certain way immoral that could jeopardize the marriage. How the relationship between a young black man and an elder Finnish lady functions has been pre-eminently imagined, perceived, and practiced based on a normalization of the categorizations between “we” and “others”, between “man” and “woman”, and between Africa and Finland. A radical politics of distinction plays out herein. The normalization of categorization not only directly render Omar, the exploited under constant surveillance as a form of exploitation, but also exposes him to inevitable stark racism outright. Once Omar and his wife were taking a walk. Two Finnish men shouted to them rudely and offensively. When he was about to defend himself (themselves), his wife stopped him: it is better to just let sleeping dogs lie. Omar and his wife are both victims of racism in this scenario, because of the logic of categorization that makes an African man essentially African, and a white woman being with a black man humiliating. Omar and his wife are both the exploited in an environment charted with racism. Additionally, when Omar is dependent on his wife to stay in Finland, and “exploited” in the relationship and everyday encounters with an implication of racism, his wife is constantly stressed. This could be understood as the price of surveillance; just as laborious investment is the price of exterminating weeds. Omar's wife constantly monitors him (surveillance), so she

could be seen as the domesticator. But Omar is open to the future of cheating on his wife by saying there is no absolute honesty and made it clear his wife's surveillance had a bad effect on the marriage, which could result in his future "dishonesty", so he makes the wife suffer, if not now, then in the future. So, in this case, he could be seen as the domesticator and exploiter. There is a switch of position here. That is also the case with weeding. Weeding is laborious work. They do it every day for long hours. So weeding demands labor from gardeners. Omar pictures himself in the coming ethical dilemma that requires him as an ethical subject to respond to the ethical demands rooted in his belief of honesty and trust, to return to the everyday moral dispositions (Zigon 2007). His claim that he is a person of his own could maybe be understood this way: he is an autonomous individual and a socially constrained individual at the same time (Englund and Leach 2000, 229). His self-formation is in dialogue with what is deemed to be good and moral by his significant other and his community/culture (Taylor 1989, 42). His diluted "honesty" is a moral debt his wife needs to pay (possible betrayal in the future), by his reconceptualization of moralities ("I don't believe in the word honesty.").

Reciprocity and Mutualism

Reciprocity and mutualism are two modes of existence alternative to exploitation (Hage 2017). The first is based on the logic of gift exchange (Mauss 1966) and the second emerged from the studies of animism (Tylor 1871) and "mutuality" in kinship (Sahlins 2013). The boundaries between entities is a contact and exchange point rather than sovereignty in reciprocal mode, and the boundaries are more unclear and nonexistent in the mutualist mode (Hage 2017, conclusion). These two modes of being are also found in people's becoming with more-than-human species.

Affinity beyond "wild legalities"

When I posted in Facebook bunnies' group to inquire about the culling, I got many comments saying this is not the right place to ask this question, because many group members know bunnies as pets. The group is filled with discussions of bunnies' life routines that shows care, which seems to suggest a companionship. Some have told me

that they think it is a pity that bunnies are killed outdoors, and this contrasts with the mode of being of extermination.

Studies show that bunnies' relative European hares are invasive and endanger mountain hares in Finland, however, it is very common to find traces of reciprocal and mutualist entanglements. For example, I found apples in the snow on Christmas eve of 2022 in Myllypuro. It seems that when some people are having a Christmas meal, hares shouldn't be left without. Feeding hares is seen from time to time in the neighborhood (see figure 22), and seagull babies are always provided with water, even though seagulls are known by many people to be annoying birds. According to regulations, wild animals like hares should be protected but not fed. Aki tried to be quick when feeding a hare, a carrot because he doesn't want the neighbors to see him feeding as "some people may not like it because you shouldn't feed the wild animals, and it's not necessarily good for the animal". Nonetheless, "one carrot here and there doesn't make them forget how to find food". This affinity for hares seems to be partially rooted in natural law and different from the city's "wild legalities" that prioritize wild animals (Braverman 2021, 22).



Figure 22. The man fed and watched the hare. Myllypuro. Photo by author.

Becoming with nonhuman animals

Luc comes to the café at Aurinkolahti almost every day to feed sparrows. He has diabetes so he doesn't eat sugar, but he always buys cinnamon bread, tears it into pieces and spreads it to the sparrows next to his table (see figure 23). "You see? I learn from him when I give him food," said Luc, "When the baby comes, the mother takes the food and the baby waits, showing respect for her mom. It is like when babies eat breastmilk, he looks into his mom's eyes, to say thank you. Thank you, mom. Then what I see when I am giving the food, then the small baby comes.... That's what she wants. To respect her mom." Luc related to sparrows with care and curiosity. Interestingly, he has told me when in Finland, it is important to "learn the Finnish culture", and one way, as he said, is to "learn how Finnish people treat animals", which is different in France where people only want to catch them. Attending animals is a way of his cultural adaptation in Finland.



Figure 23. Feeding sparrows bread. Photo by author.

Meri, who lives in Rastila, told me that she has a very special relationship with the trees in her neighborhood. She took me on a 10-hour Rastila-Vuosaari tour, during which she introduced me to many trees she was particularly fond of. "I can't say they are family members as some say about dogs. But I do have an attachment. Sometimes I may touch a tree like this. It is almost like a greeting. I know some people hug trees, but I don't hug trees, but there is a connection. There was a tree, an Arctic maple tree was the most beautiful. They curved beautifully." Meri put her hand on one tree and laughed.

Sadly, when she hears the sound of cutting a tree from balcony, “my skin itches and I get stressed”, and following that comes “pain”. Although, as was stated, she does not take a tree as a person, one way of understanding this is that the mutualist mode of existence as embodiment (Van Wolputte 2004) exists in the production of her joyful and painful bodies. She does not take a dog as a person either, because of her Christian beliefs that “an animal is not a person”. She has never had a dog because she is allergic, but during the covid a dog was the first thing that she ever touched and made her eyes tear: “I see a puppy. He sees me and goes unleashed. Because it’s a puppy. He starts to jump, and I go to start touching it. I suddenly feel the tears coming in my eyes. I told the man this is the first living thing I am touching. I can feel the warmth and life in that dog. During covid I am alone. I cannot touch my father and whoever I was with before has gone his way. Not touching everything alive for a long time and I was totally broken now. If you sit here, you see many dogs passing by. If someone has a dog, it is easy to catch a conversation. I haven’t been to the city for two years. The only things with me are the dogs and dog owners.” Not deeming dogs as persons does not mean a flourishing coexistence based on differences is impossible. That night, we bumped into a few dogs who greeted us with the most curious and welcoming looks, and their owners; Meri, one dog owner she just met and a bucking “Vesikoira” (Water dog) held a conversation in the dim woods for half an hour! The dog owner brought every detail of her private life out: from a strong-minded waterdog to a hospitalized father, which Meri said is very rare normally without a dog, because “you would not just have a conversation with a stranger like that”. Nature (in this case multispecies entanglements) does offer opportunities to make people break some boundaries.

Conclusion

The chapter implies how some animals can be exploited if they fail to do multiple boundary crossings simultaneously: crossing the conceptual boundary demarcating alienness from indigeneity when crossing the national borders or the boundary of domesticated and wildness. Moving on to humans, Meri complained she had seen Somalian kids throwing stones at swans. She shouted angrily to stop them. The kids disregarded her: “you are not our mom!” Meri had to get the father to intervene. While

this might just be a kid play, criminalizing African immigrants' more-than-human traditions (hunting) that exist in thoughts rather than actions points to a colonial regime (Braverman 2021). Immigrants can face exploitation if they don't do multiple boundary crossings simultaneously: crossing the "boundary of nature as a distinctly Finnish way of living" in terms of the right Finnish ways to relate to animals in the eyes of many Finnish people and regulated by laws, after crossing the national borders to come and live in Finland. This is why an animal can be a person and a thing at the same time, and how this way of thinking might contribute to undermining racism and speciesism, by challenging the normalization of the boundaries. The underlying colonial regime is a regime of classification and categorization, based on not only a species taxonomy (Green 2022), but also a racial taxonomy that is proved wrong by science (Graves and Goodman 2021). Violence on animals and humans simultaneously is generated in imagination, identification and dissection in the knitted bureaucratic, colonial, scientific, and gendered enterprises (Mathur 2021; Stephenson 2010; Parreñas 2018). This chapter offered a peek at how racism and speciesism have the same logic of exploitation. Speciesism and racism are seen in the taxonomic difference between hares and bunnies, the whole discussions about alien species, and Omar and his Finnish wife's relationship dynamics and the "unsatisfactory" marriage status quo that has a conceptual foundation of categorization and classification behind. It marks boundaries between different self and others, between different ethnic or racial groups. For example, the stereotype people hold when seeing an interracial relationship, and how the certain "facts" of other Gambia men betrayed their Finnish wife influenced the way Omar's Finnish wife perceived and navigated her relationship with him. So, racism and speciesism have the same logic as was shown in my materials, and Hage did talk about categorizations, but it is not something he focused on. Different from Hage (2017) , the chapter shows that alternatives lie not only in reciprocity and mutualism but reach beyond that to appeal for the opposite of normalization and standardization (Tsing 2009) defining categorizations and the configurations of categories, the way things work, in thinking and practices, which are based on essentializing the differences between self and others, individual and society, humans and nonhumans, indigeneity and alienness, domestic and wild, animal and person, man and woman, black and white and so on. Thinking of

and treating animals as a thing/food, as huntable beings seem to be the opposite of reciprocity or mutualism, and this suggests that endorsing and cultivating the two modes of being does not always contribute to anti-exploitation, as the evolving of inextricable relations even exist prior to the conceptualization of the two alternatives modes of existence. Some boundaries are self-imposed, but breaking other-imposed categories is needed: it is an act of crossing boundaries, including the conceptual, material and spatial ones.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

“Locating regime” (Green 2019) refers to “a knowledge system and/or structure that calibrates the relative value, significance and meaning of locations”²⁶. The approach looks at disconnections as well as connections to understand how any place is both linked to and separated from other places in a range of different ways. Multiple regularly changing and shifting connections and disconnections generate relative values and significance of any given place. The approach focuses on the making of a place in relation to other places through gaining different values and meanings according to a range of different ways, rather than focusing on what places are in themselves. Because of Finland’s official representations of nature and some people’s understanding of it, nature could be seen as a regime that locates Finland. As has been shown in the previous chapters, when nature works as a regime that locates Finland, it has the potential to produce a location where racial, ethnic, and cultural others are not always present. It does not mean they are not in Finland physically, or interacting with other people in Finland. It could be argued that they seem to be temporarily absent from Finland; instead, they appear to be scattered all over the world (maybe their countries of origin) on the grounds of their saturated otherness.

This thesis shows that the ways people relate to nature in Finland are patchy. Finnish nature is perceived and experienced in many ways, being much richer and more complicated than the popular discourses and understandings of what Finnish nature is like, and how people relate to nature, as is pictured by the authorities and held by many

²⁶ [Locating regimes | Crosslocations | University of Helsinki](#)

people, including immigrants and “Finns”. Because nature gives rise to different social practices that make and undo boundaries of social relations in people's relating to others and understanding differences, social norms and social relations mediate between nature and culture in the ethnographic context. People make differences and communicate across differences. By doing so, they make and cross multiple boundaries, in terms of ethnicity, culture, race, language, nationality and so on. The thesis shows that establishing a rigid representational image of Finnish nature and making “living close to nature as a distinctly Finnish way of living” a norm is problematic, because it is a demarcation of belonging and not belonging, of citizenship and alienness that could bear implicit racism, even though immigrants may not be aware of the existence of this cultural evaluation of them, or not actively trying to become Finnish. As it can be seen throughout the materials and interviews that many immigrants use the language “my own country” which doesn't refer to Finland, meaning that they also self-distance themselves from Finland by not seeing Finland as their own country, instead, their home lie somewhere else and they have a home country where they come from. This could be understood as a process of self-making boundaries. But this does not make forming “living close to nature as a distinctly Finnish way of living” a norm unproblematic, because it is after all a demarcation of belonging and not belonging, of citizenship and alienness that could bear implicit racism. Immigrants are located in this way.

Decolonizing Finnish nature is needed, and it is implied in the patchiness of human-nature relations. Conceptually, the binary opposition between nature and culture is unraveled by the research results. It requires understanding nature-culture articulations on the ground, namely how people make differences and communicate across differences. It can be propelled by attending to various boundaries, being aware of them, understanding them, adjusting them, crossing them, maintaining the self-made ones and giving up the ones imposed on others. The research results show that underneath the appearance of the rigidity of the distinctly Finnish way of living close to nature is actually considerable flexibility, a constantly changing set of conditions that is made to appear timeless and rigid, but is actually not so. Politically, it requires keeping “nature” as a concept separate from a “culture of nature” that is tied to Finnish national character. People can have a

lifestyle of “living close to nature” and not being self-identified Finnish; people can also dislike Finnish nature, while being Finnish or trying to integrate in Finland as immigrants.

The thesis discusses that nature provides a ground for diverse practices and ideas, which are often conceptualized by the non-immigrant "Finns" as cultural differences. This is in congruence with the conventional cultural representation of Finnish nature and living close to nature as a distinctly Finnish way of living. These have the risk of cultural essentialism, that further pushes immigrants away from "being in Finland" and becoming a part of it.

Nonetheless, nature also gives rise to different social practices that make and undo boundaries of social relations in people's relating to others and understanding differences (Chapter 3). The issue of weeding, discussed in chapter 4, is also about collective responsibility - it is not only about “controlling nature” but also about recognition of responsibility towards all the other allotment gardeners in the vicinity. If one allotment has a lot of weeds, the neighbors will also develop a bigger weed issue. So, the rules are there in a sense to encourage collective responsibility and collaboration. This implies that it does not matter where the allotment keepers are from, what they look like, or which languages they speak: what matters is that they garden well. How nature is experienced, as is seen here, is also regulated by the idea of maintaining a community. People also form new social relations through being in nature (e.g., “Dog” talks in Chapter 4).

Forming social relations between different people makes it possible to bridge the gap between the live nature and cultural perceptions, or at least to form a dialogue between the two. Anti-racism and decolonization of Finnish nature rely on this. They also rely on understanding racism comprehensively. It means that a lot of racism is actually based on the idea that people do not belong here, but somewhere else. Understanding racism should not just be based on physical beings; the idea that people coming from somewhere and now being here should not be underestimated. It is about where they come from. This is another way of looking at racism. Bringing all the examples together (hare, bunnies, immigrants, invasive species, weeds...), the one thing they have in common is that they are spatially in the wrong place. The weeds are in

places where they shouldn't be, and immigrants are not placed in Finland in the beginning. Bunnies are pests that are in the wrong places. People playing loud music in the forest, which is also a wrong place. People lighting a fire too near to a tree are also in the wrong place. All of these people and animals are in the unacceptable wrong places. Garlic chives are also about a rearrangement of spatial locations in terms of the places people practice it. All of them seem to be in a movement from somewhere they belong to somewhere they don't belong, which is judged with racist implications. The patchiness of Finnish nature, more precisely, people's relations to Finnish nature, need not be flattened. If possible, all patches should be recognized as rightful ones that belong to Finland, namely being in the right place rather than misplaced. People and animals judged by racism and speciesism in Finland could belong here.

References

- Bessire, Lucas, and David Bond. 2014. "Ontological anthropology and the deferral of critique." *American Ethnologist* 41, 440-56.
- Bolton, Maggie, and Cathrine Degnen. 2010. eds. *Animals and science: from colonial encounters to the biotech industry* Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars.
- Braverman, Irus. 2015. *Wild life: The institution of nature*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.
- Braverman, Irus. 2021. "Wild Legalities: Animals and Settler Colonialism in Palestine/Israel." *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 44 (1): 7-27.
- Candea, Matei. 2010. "I fell in love with Carlos the meerkat: Engagement and detachment in human-animal relations." *American Ethnologist* 37 (2): 241-258.
- Comaroff, Jean, & Comaroff John. 2001. "Naturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse, and the Post-colonial state." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27(3): 627-651
- Dervin, Fred. 2019. *Cracking the Myth: Restoring the reality of Finnish education*. Beijing: Moveable Type Beijing.
- Descola, Philippe. 2005. "On anthropological knowledge." *Social Anthropology*. 13 (1): 65-73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8676.2005.tb00120.x>

- Descola, Philippe. 2013. *Beyond Nature and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books.
- Granqvist, Kimmo. 2020. "Critical evaluation of Romani inclusion strategies in Finland and Sweden." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*. 29 (1): 33-44.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2020.1801394>
- Graves, Joseph, and Alan Goodman. 2021. *Racism, Not Race*. New York City: Columbia University Press.
- Green, Sarah. 2019. *Initial background to crosslocations*. University of Helsinki.
<https://www2.helsinki.fi/en/researchgroups/crosslocations/initial-background-to-crosslocations>.
- Green, Sarah. 2022. "The Hedgehog from Jordan: or, how to locate the movement of wild animals in a partially Mediterranean context." In *Locating the Mediterranean: Connections and Separations across Time and Space*, 199-221. ed. C. Rommel, & J. Viscomi Gaudeamus. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press. <https://doi.org/10.33134/HUP-18-9>
- Hage, Ghassan. 2017. *Is racism an environmental threat?* Malden: Polity, 2017. Series: *Debating race series*.
- Haraway, Donna. 2008. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Harris, Marvin. 1966. "The Cultural Ecology of India's Sacred Cattle." *Current Anthropology* 7:51- 66.
- Holbraad, Martin, and Morten Pedersen. 2017. *The ontological turn: an anthropological exposition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ingold, Tim. 2000. *The perception of the environment: essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Ingold, Tim. 2016: "Rejoinder to Descola's 'Biolatry: a surrender of understanding'", *Anthropological Forum*, DOI: 10.1080/00664677.2016.1212532

- Kauppinen, Timo. 2002. "The beginning of immigrant settlement in the Helsinki metropolitan area and the role of social housing." *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* volume 17: 173–197.
- Kohn, Eduardo. 2013. *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kloek, Marjolein, Arjen E. Buijs, Jan J. Boersema and Matthijs G.C. Schouten. 2018. "Cultural echoes in Dutch immigrants' and non-immigrants' understandings and values of nature." *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 61:5-6, 818-840, DOI: 10.1080/09640568.2017.1319803
- Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Latour, Bruno. 2004. "Whose Cosmos, Which Cosmopolitics? Comments on the Peace Terms of Ulrich Beck." *Common Knowledge* 10(3):450-462.
<https://doi.org/10.1215/0961754X-10-3-450>
- Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the social*. Oxford: University Press.
- Leach, Edmund. 1964. "Anthropological Aspects of Language: Animal Categories and Verbal Abuse." *Anthrozoös* 2(3): 151–165.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1963. *Totemism*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Lehtiniemi, Maiju, Petri Nummi, and Erkki Leppäkoski. 2016. *Jättiputkesta citykaniin – Vieraslajit Suomessa*. Jyväskylä: Docendo.
- Łobodzińska, Anna. 2011. "Immigrants and Immigration Policy in Ageing Finland." *Bulletin of Geography. Socio-economic Series* [online]. 19 May 2011, nr 15, s. 43–55. DOI 10.1515/v10089-011-0003-z.
- Mauss, Marcel. 1966. *The gift*. London: Cohen & West.
- Mbembe, Achille. 2019. *Necropolitics*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- McElwee, Pamela. 2016. *Forests Are Gold: Trees, People, and Environmental Rule in Vietnam*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Ong, Aihwa. 1996. "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States [and Comments and Reply]." *Current Anthropology* 37 (5): 737-762.

- Parreñas, Juno. 2018. *Decolonizing Extinction: The Work of Care in Orangutan Rehabilitation*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Pálsson, Gisli. 1991. The idea of fish: land and sea in the Icelandic World-view.
- Polanyi, Karl. 1944. *The Great Transformation: Economic and Political Origins of Our Time*. New York: Rinehart.
- Puhakka, Pitkänen and Oinonen. 2021. "Does nature support the integration of immigrant youth? A study on adolescents in the city of Lahti, Finland." The 10th MMV Conference: Managing outdoor recreation experiences in the Anthropocene – Resources, markets, innovations. Norwegian University of Life Sciences.
- Rošker, Jana. (2018). Book Review on *New Frontiers of Chinese Philosophy*. *Comparative Philosophy* 9 (2).
- Scott, Michael. 2015. "Cosmogony Today: Counter-Cosmogony, Perspectivism, and the Return of Anti-biblical Polemic." *Religion and society*, 6(1): 44-61.
<https://doi.org/10.3167/arrs.2015.060104>
- Steward, Julian. 1955. *Theory of Culture Change: The Methodology of Multilinear Evolution*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Tsing, Anna. 2012. "Empire's salvage heart: Why diversity matters in the global political economy." *Focaal*, 2012(64): 36-50.
- Tsing, Anna. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Tsing, Anna, Andrew Mathews, and Nils Bubandt. 2019. "Patchy Anthropocene: Landscape Structure, Multispecies History, and the Retooling of Anthropology." *Current Anthropology* 60(s20): 186-197. <https://doi.org/10.1086/703391>
- Vaisman, Noa. 2013. "Shedding our selves: perspectivism, the bounded subject and the nature-culture divide" In *Biosocial Becomings: Integrating Social and Biological Anthropology*, 106-122. ed. T. Ingold and G. Pálsson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Viveiros de Castro. 1998. "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism." *J. Roy. Anthropol. Inst. (N.S.)* 4: 469-488.